MARY MAGDALEN

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HISTORIA AMORIS
THE POMPS OF SATAN
IMPERIAL PURPLE
THE ANATOMY OF NEGATION
VANITY SQUARE
THE PERFUME OF EROS

MARY MAGDALEN

A Chronicle

By

EDGAR SALTUS

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MARY MAGDALEN

CHAPTER I.

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I.

"THREE to one on Scarlet!"

Throughout the brand-new circus were the eagerness, the gesticulations, shouts, and murmurs of an impatient throng. On a ledge above the entrance a man stood, a strip of silk extended in his finger-tips. Beneath, on either side, were gates. About him were series of ascending tiers, close-packed, and brilliant with multi-colored robes and parasols. The sand of the track was very white: where the sunlight fell it had the glitter of broken glass. In the centre was a low wall; at one end were pillars and seven great balls of wood; at the other, seven dolphins, their tails in the air. The uproar

mounted in unequal vibrations, and stirred the pulse. The air was heavy with odors, with the emanations of the crowd, the cloy of myrrh. Through the exits whiffs of garlic filtered from the kitchens below, and with them, from the exterior arcades, came the beat of timbrels, the click of castanets. Overhead was a sky of troubled blue; beyond, a lake.

"They are off!"

The strip of silk had fluttered and fallen, the gates flew open, there was a rumble of wheels, a whirlwind of sand, a yell that deafened, and four tornadoes burst upon the track.

They were shell-shaped, and before each six horses tore abreast. Between the horses' ears were swaying feathers; their manes had been dyed clear pink, the forelocks puffed; and as they bounded, the drivers, standing upright, had the skill to guide but not the strength to curb. About their waists the reins were tied; at the side a knife hung; from the forehead the hair was shaven; and every-

thing they wore, the waistcoat, the short skirt, the ribbons, was of one color, scarlet, yellow, emerald, or blue: and this color, repeated on the car and on the harness, distinguished them from those with whom they raced.

Already the cars had circled the hippodrome four times. There were but three more rounds, and Scarlet, which in the beginning had trailed applause behind it as a torch trails smoke, lagged now a little to the rear. Green was leading. Its leadership did not seem to please; it was cursed at and abused, threatened with naked fist; yet when for the sixth time it turned the terminal pillar, a shout that held the thunder of Atlas leaped abroad. Where the yellow car, pursued by the blue, had been, was now a mass of sickening agitation—twelve fallen horses kicking each other into pulp, the drivers brained already; and down upon that barrier of blood and death swept the scarlet car. In a second it veered and passed; in that second a flash of steel had cut the reins, and, as the car swung

round, the driver, released, was tossed to the track. What then befell him no one cared. Stable-men were busy there; the car itself, unguided, continued vertiginously on its course. If it had lagged before, there was no lagging now. The hoofs that beat upon the ring plunged with it through the din down upon Emerald, and beyond it to the goal. And as the last dolphin vanished and the seventh ball was removed, the palm was granted, and the spectators shouted a salutation to the giver of the games—Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee.

He was superb, this Antipas. His beard was like a lady's fan. On his cheeks was a touch of alkanet; his hair, powdered blue, was encircled by a diadem set with gems. About his shoulders was a mantle that had a broad purple border; beneath it was a tunic of yellow silk. Between the railing of the tribune in which he sat one foot was visible, shod with badger's skin, dyed blood-red. He was superb, but his eyelids drooped. He had a straight nose and a retreating fore-

head, a physiognomy that was at once weak and vicious. He looked melancholy; it may be that he was bored. At the salutation, however, he affected a smile, and motioned that the games should continue. And as the signals, the dolphins and the seven balls, appeared again, his thoughts, forsaking the circus, went back to Rome.

Insecure in the hearts of his people, uncertain even of the continued favor of the volatile monster who was lounging then in his Caprian retreat, it was with the idea of pleasing the one, of flattering the other, that he had instituted the games. For here in his brand-new Tiberias, a city which he had built in a minute, whose colonnades and porticoes he had bought ready-made in Rome, and had erected by means of that magic which only the Romans possessed—in this capital of a parvenu was a mongrel rabble of Greeks, Cypriotes, Egyptians, Cappadocians, Syrians, and Jews, whose temper was uncertain, and whose rebellion to be feared.

Annonâ et spectaculis indeed! Antipas knew the dictum well; and with an uprising in the yonderland, and a sedition under his feet, what more could he do than quell the first with his mercenaries, and disarm the second with his games? Tiberius, whom he emulated, never deigned to appear at the hippodrome; it was a way he had of showing his contempt for a nation. Antipas might have imitated his sovereign in that, only he was not sure that Tiberius would take the compliment as it was meant. He might view such abstention as the airs of a trumpery tetrarch, and depose him there and then. He was irascible, and when displeased there were dungeons at his command which reopened with difficulty, and where existence was not secure. Ah, that sausage of blood and mud, how he feared and envied him! An emperor now, a god hereafter, truly the dominion of this world and a part of the next was a matter concerning which fear and envy well might be.

And as Antipas' vagabond fancy roamed

in and out through the possibilities of the Cæsar's sway, unconsciously he thought of another monster, the son of a priest of Ascalon, who had defied the Sanhedrim, won Cleopatra, murdered the woman he loved the most, conquered Judæa and found it too small for his magnificence—of that Herod in fact, his own father, who gave to Jerusalem her masterpiece of marble and gold, and meanwhile, drunk with the dream of empire, had made himself successor of Solomon, Sultan of Israel, King of the Jews, and who, even as he died, had vomited death and crowns, diadems and crucifixions.

It was through his legacy that Antipas ruled. The kingdom had been sliced into three parts, of one of which Augustus had made a province; over another a brother whom he hated ruled; and he had but this third part, the smallest yet surely the most fair. Its unparalleled garden surrounded him, and its eye, the lake, was just beyond. In the amphitheatre the hills formed was a city of

pink and blue marble, of cupolas, porticoes, volutes, bronze doors, and copper roofs. Along the fringe of the shore were Choraizin and Bethsaïda, purple with pomegranates, Capharnahum, beloved for its honey, and Magdala, scented with spice. The slopes and intervales were very green where they were not yellow, and there were terraces of grape, glittering cliffs, and a sky of troubled blue, wadded with little gold-edged clouds.

Yes, it was paradise, but it was not monarchy. It was to that he aspired. As he mused, a rancid-faced woman decked with paint and ostrich-plumes snarled in his ear:

"What have you heard of Iohanan?"

And as with a gesture he signified that he had heard nothing, she snarled again.

Antipas turned to her reflectively, but it was of another that he thought—the brown-eyed bride that Arabia had given him, the lithe-limbed princess of the desert whose heart had beaten on his own, whom he had loved with all the

strength of youth and weakness, and whom he had deserted while at Rome for his brother's wife, his own niece, Herodias, who snarled at his side.

Behind her were her women, and among them was one who, as the cars swept by, turned her head with that movement a flower has which a breeze has stirred. Her eyes were sultry, darkened with stibium ; on her cheek was the pink of the sea-shell, and her lips made one vermilion rhyme. The face was oval and rather small ; and though it was beautiful as victory, the wonder of her eyes, which looked the haunts of hope fulfilled, the wonder of her mouth, which seemed to promise more than any mortal mouth could give, were forgotten in her hair, which was not orange nor flame, but a blending of both. And now, as the cars passed, her thin nostrils quivered, her hand rose as a bird does and fluttered with delight.

On the adjacent tiers were Greeks, fat-calved Cypriotes, Cappadocians with flowers painted on their skin, red Egypt-

ians, Thracian mercenaries, Galilean fishermen, and a group of Lydians in women's clothes.

On the tier just beyond was a man gazing wistfully at the woman that sat behind Herodias. He was tall and sinewy, handsome with the comeliness of the East. His beard was full, unmarred at the corners; his name was Judas. Now and then he moistened his under lip, and a Thracian who sat at his side heard him murmur "Mary" and some words of Syro-Chaldaic which the Thracian did not understand.

To him Mary paid no attention. She had turned from the track. An officer had entered the tetrarch's tribune and addressed the prince. Antipas started; Herodias colored through her paint. The latter evidently was pleased.

"Iohanan!" she exclaimed. "To Machærus with him! You may believe in fate and mathematics; I believe in the axe."

And questioningly Herodias looked at her husband, who avoided her look, yet

signified his assent to the command she had given.

The din continued. From the tier beyond, Judas still gazed into the perils of Mary's eyes.

"Dear God," he muttered, in answer to an anterior thought, "it would be the birthday of my life."

CHAPTER II.

II.

"O Prophet Iohanan, how fair you are!"

Iohanan was hideous. His ankles were in stocks, a chain about his waist was looped in a ring that hung from the wall. About his body were tattered furs, his hair was tangled, the face drawn and yellow. Vermin were visible on his person. His lips twitched, and his gums, discolored, were as those of a camel that has journeyed too far. A tooth projected, green as a fresh almond is; the chin projected too, and from it on one side a rill of saliva dripped upon the naked breast. On the terrace he was a blur, a nightmare in a garden.

"Ah, how fair!"

Tantalizing as temptation, Mary stood just beyond his reach. Her eyes were full of compliments, her body was bent,

and, the folds of her gown held back, she swayed a little, in the attitude of one cajoling a tiger. She was quite at home and at her ease, and yet prepared for instant flight.

Iohanan, or John—surnamed, because of practices of his, the Baptist—beckoned her to approach. In his eyes was the innocence that oxen have.

"My body is chained, but my soul is free!"

Mary made a pirouette, and through the terrace of the citadel the rattles on her ankles rang.

It was appalling, this citadel; it dominated the entire land. Perched on a peak of basalt, it overhung an abyss in which Asphalitis, the Bitter Sea, lay, a stretch of sapphire to the sun. In the distance were the heights of Abraham, the crests of Gilead. Before it was the infinite, behind it the desert. At its base a hamlet crouched, and a path hewn in the rock crawled in zigzags to its gates. Irregular walls surrounded it, in some places a hundred cubits high, and in

each of the many angles was a turret. Seen from below it was a threat in stone, but within was a caress, one of those rapturous palaces that only the Orientals build. It was called Machærus. Peopled with slaves and legends, it was a haunt of ghosts and fierce delights.

And now as Mary tripped before the prophet the walls alone repelled. The terrace was a garden in which were lilies and sentries. For entrance there was a portal of red porphyry, above which was a balcony hemmed by a balustrade of yellow Numidian stone.

Against it Antipas leaned. He had been eyeing the desert in tremulous surmise. The day before, he had caught the glitter of lances, therewith spirals of distant smoke, and he had become fearful lest Aretas, that king of Arabia Petræa whose daughter he had deserted, might be meditating attack. But now there was nothing, at most a triangular mass speeding westwards, of which only the edges moved, and which he knew to be a flight of cranes.

He took heart again and gazed in the valley below. It was the anniversary of his birth. To celebrate it he had invited the stewards of his lands, the notables of Galilee, the elect of Jerusalem, the procurator of Judæa, the emir of Tadmor, mountaineers and Pharisees, Scribes and herdsmen.

But in the valley only a few shepherds were visible. Along the ramparts soldiers paced. At the further end of the terrace a group of domestics was busy with hampers and luggage. The day was solemnly still, exquisitely clear; and between two hills came a glare of gold projected from the Temple of Jerusalem.

Through the silence rang the tinkle of the rattles that Mary wore. The prophet was beckoning her.

"And Martha?" the tetrarch heard him ask.

The pirouette ceased awkwardly. Mary's eyes forget their compliments. Hew brows contracted, and, as though perplexed, she held her head a little to one side.

"There," he added, "there, I know you well. It was at Bethany I saw you first. Yes, yes, I remember perfectly; you were leaving, and Martha was in tears. Only a little since I had speech with her. She spoke of you; she knew you were called the Magdalen. No," he continued, for Mary had shrunk back, "no, I will not curse. There is another by whom you will be blessed."

Mary laughed. "I am going to Rome. Tiberius will give me a palace. I shall sleep on the down the Teutons bring. I shall drink pearls dissolved in falernian. I shall sup on peacocks' tongues."

"No, Mary, Rome you will never see. The Eternal has you in His charge. Your shame will be washed away."

"Shame to you," she interrupted. "Shame and starvation too." She made as though she were about to pirouette again. "Whom are you talking of?"

"One whose shoes I am unworthy to bear."

For a moment he seemed to meditate; then, with the melancholy of one renounc-

ing some immense ambition, he murmured, half to himself, half to the sky, "For him to increase I must diminish."

"As for that, you are not much to look at now. I must go. I must braid my hair; the emir's eyes are eager."

"Mary," he hissed, and the sudden asperity of his voice coerced her as a bit might do, "you will go to Capharnahum, you will seek him, you will say Iohanan is descended into the tombs to announce the Son of David."

Through the lateral entrance to the terrace a number of guests had entered. From the balcony above, Antipas leaned and listened. Some one touched him; it was Herodias.

"The procurator is coming," she announced. "You should be at the gate."

"Ah!"

He seemed indifferent. What Iohanan had said concerning the Son of David stirred him like the point of sword. He felt that there could be no such person; his father had put a stop to all that. And yet, if there were!

His indifference surprised Herodias.

"What are you staring at?" she asked; and to assure herself she looked over the balustrade. "That carrion? You should——"

Her hand drawn across her throat completed the sentence.

The tetrarch shook his head. There was no hurry. Then, too, the prophet was useful. He reviled Jerusalem, and that flattered Galilee. But there was another reason, which he kept to himself. Iohanan affected him as no one had done before.

He feared him, chained though he was, and into that fear something akin to admiration entered. In his heart he wished he had let him alone. No, there was no hurry. As he assured her of that the prophet looked up.

"Jezebel!"

The guests approached. Their number had increased. There were Greek merchants from Hippos and Sepphoris, Pharisees from Jericho, and Scribes from

Jerusalem. Herodias clapped her hands. A negro, naked to the waist, appeared.

"Take him below."

But the guests surrounded Iohanan. The Pharisees recognized him at once. He was the terror of the hierarchs.

As he cried out at Herodias he seemed as though he would rise and wrench his bonds and mount to where she was. His eyes had lost their pathos; they blazed.

"Woe unto you!" he shouted, "and woe unto your barren bed! Though you hid in the bowels of the earth, in the uttermost depths of a jungle, the stench of your incest would betray you. Woe unto you, I say; the swine will turn from you, the Eternal will rend you, and the heart of hell will vomit you back!"

Herodias shook with anger. She was livid. Murmurs circulated through the increasing throng.

The Pharisees edged nearer. On their foreheads were slips of vellum on which passages of the Law had been inscribed. About their left arms other slips extended spiralwise from the elbow to the

end of the third finger. They were in white; where their garments had become soiled, the spots had been chalked.

To them the prophet showed his teeth. "And woe unto you too, race of vipers, bladders of wind! As the fire devours the stubble, and the flame consumes the chaff, so your root will be rottenness and your seed go up as dust. Fear will engulf you like a torrent. The high peaks will be broken, the mountains will sever, and night be upon all. The valleys and hills will be strewn with your corpses, the rocks will run with your blood, the plain will drink it, and the vultures feast on your flesh. Woe unto you all, I say, that call good evil, and evil good!"

The invective continued. It enveloped the world. Everything was to be destroyed. Presently it subsided; the voice of the prophet sank lower; his eyes sought the sky, the pupils dilated; and the dream of his nation, the triumphant future, the sanctification of the faithful,

the magnificence that was to be, poured rapturously from his lips.

"The whole land will glow with glory. The sky will be a rose in bloom. The meadows will rejoice, and the earth will be filled with men and maidens singing and kneeling to Thee, Immanuel, whom I await."

The vision would have expanded, perhaps, but the chain that bound him was loosed, sinewy arms were dragging him away. As he went, he glared up again at Herodias. His face had lost its beatitude.

"You will be stripped of your purple, Jezebel; your diadem will be trodden under foot. The pains of a woman in travail will be as joys unto yours. There will be not enough stones to throw at you, and the abomination of your lust will bellow, Accursed, even beyond the tomb."

The anathema fainted in the distance. The Scribes consulted between their teeth. By the Pharisees Antipas was blamed. A merchant from Hippos did

not understand, and the Law was explained. That a man should marry his brother's wife was a duty, only in this instance it had not occurred to the brother to die beforehand. Then, again, by her first husband Herodias had a child, and in that was the abomination.

The merchant did not wholly grasp the distinction, but he nodded as though he had.

"There was a child, was there?"

A captain of the garrison answered: "A girl, Salomè."

He said nothing further, but the merchant could see that his mouth watered at the thought of her.

The crowd had become very dense. Suddenly a trumpet blared. At the gate was Pontius Pilate. On his head was a high and dazzling helmet. His tunic was short, open at the neck. His legs were bare. He was shod with shoes that left the toes exposed. From his cuirass a gorgon's head had, in deference to local prejudice, been effaced; in its stead were scrolls and thunderbolts. From the

belt rows of straps, embroidered and fringed, fell nearly to the knee. He held his head in the air. His features were excellent, and his beard hung in rows of short overlapping curls.

Behind him was his body-guard. Before him Antipas stood, welcoming the Roman in Greek.

In the sky now were the advancing steps of night; in crevices of the basalt the leaves of the baaras weed had begun to flicker. It was time for the festival to begin; and, preceding the guests, Antipas passed into a hall beyond.

It was oblong, curved at the ends, and so vast that the roof was vague. On the walls were slabs of different colors, marble spotted like the skin of serpents, and onyx flecked with violet. On two sides were galleries supported by columns of sandstone. A third gallery formed a semicircle. Opposite, at the further end, on a dais, was the table of the tetrarch.

Antipas faced the assemblage. At his left was the procurator, at his right the emir of Tadmor. Curtains were looped

on either side. Above were panels; they separated, and flowers fell. On a little stool next to the couch on which the emir lay was a beautiful boy with curly hair. The couch of the procurator was covered with a dim Babylonian shawl. That of the tetrarch was of ivory incrusted with gold. All three were cushioned.

As the guests entered they were sprinkled with perfume. Throughout the length of the hall other tables extended, and at these they found seats and food: Syrian radishes, melons from the oases near the Oxus, white olives from Bethany, honey from Capharnahum, and the little onions of Ascalon. There were candelabra everywhere, liquids cooled with snow, cheeses big as millstones, chunks of fat in wooden bowls, and behind the tables, slaves with copper platters. On the platters were quarters of red beef, breams swimming in grease, and sunbirds with their plumage on. In the semicircular gallery musicians played, three notes, constantly repeated.

The tetrarch's table was spread with a

cloth of byssus striped with Laconian green. On it were jars of murrha filled with balsam, Sidonian goblets of colored glass, jasper amphoræ, and water-melons from Egypt. Before the procurator was a dish of oysters, lampreys, and boned barbels, mixed well together, flavored with cinnamon and assafœtida; mashed grasshoppers baked in saffron; and a roasted boar, the legs curled inward, the eyes half-closed. The emir ate abundantly of heron's eggs whipped with wine into an amber foam. When his fingers were soiled, he wiped them in the curls of the beautiful boy who sat near by.

The smell of food filled the hall, mounted to the roof The atmosphere was that of a bath, and the wines were heady. Already discussions had arisen. A mountaineer and a Galilean skiffsman had been dragged away, the one senseless, the other with features indistinguishable and masked in blood. It was a great festival, and the tetrarch was entertaining, as only he could, his friends,

his enemies, and whoever chanced that way.

"As a child he rubbed his body with the leaves of the cnyza, which is a preservative of chastity." It was a little man with restless eyes and a very long white beard detailing the virtues of Iohanan. "But," he added, "he must have found cold water better."

His neighbors laughed. One pounded the table.

"Jeshua—" he began, but everyone was talking at once.

"Jeshua—" he continued; yet, as no one would listen, he turned to a passing eunuch and caught him by the arm—"Jeshua does more; he works miracles, and not with the cnyza either."

The eunuch eluded him and escaped. However, he would not be balked; he stood up and, through the din, he shouted at the little man:

"Baba Barbulah, I tell you he is the Messiah!"

His voice was so loud it dominated the hubbub, and suddenly the hubbub ceased.

From the dais Pontius Pilate listened indifferently. Antipas held his hands behind his ears that he might hear the better. The emir paid no attention at all. On his head was a conical turban; about it were loops of sapphire and coils of pearl. He wore a vest with scant sleeves that reached to the knuckles, and trousers that overhung the instep and fell in wide wrinkles on his feet; both were of leopard-skin. Over the vest was a sleeveless tunic, clasped at the shoulders and girt at the waist. His hair was long, plentifully oiled; his beard was bushy, blue-black, and specked with silver.

Mary had approached. From the lessening waist to the slender feet her dress opened at either side. Beneath was a chemise of transparent Bactrianian tissue. From girdle to armpits were little clasps; on her ankles, bands; and above the elbow, on her bare white arm, two circlets of emeralds from the mines of Djebel Zabur.

The emir spoke to her. She listened with a glimpse of the most beautiful

teeth in the world. He put out a hand tentatively and touched her: the tissue of her garment crackled and emitted sparks. He raised a goblet to her. The wine it held was yellower than the marigold. She brushed it with her lips; he drank it off, then, refreshed, he looked her up and down.

In one hand she held a cup of horn, narrower at the top than at the end; in it were dice made of the knee-joints of gazelles, and these she rattled in his beard.

"That beautiful Sultan, will he play?"

With an ochre-tipped finger she pointed at the turban on his head. The eyes of the emir vacillated. He undid a string of gems and placed them on the table's edge. Mary unclasped a coil of emeralds and rattled the dice again. She held the cup high up, then spilled the contents out.

"Ashtaroth!" the emir cried. He had won.

Mary leaned forward, fawned upon his breast, and gazed into his face. Her

breath had the fragrance of his own oasis, her lips were moist as the pomegranate's pulp, her teeth as keen as his own desire.

"No, beautiful Sultan, it is I." With the back of her hand she disturbed the dice. "I am Ashtaroth, am I not?"

Questioningly the emir explored the unfathomable eyes that gazed into his.

On their surface floated an acquiescence to the tacit offer of his own. Then he nodded, and Mary turned and gathered the jewels from the cloth of byssus where they lay.

"I tell you he is the Messiah!" It was the angry disputant shouting at the little man.

"Who is? What are you talking about?"

Though the hubbub had ceased, throughout the hall were the mutterings of dogs disturbed.

"Jeshua," the disputant answered; "Jeshua the Nazarene."

A Pharisee, very vexed, his bonnet tottering, gnashed back: "The Messiah

will uphold the law; this Nazarene attacks it."

A Scribe interrupted: "Many things are to distinguish his advent. The light of the sun will be increased a hundredfold, the orchards will bear fruit a thousand times more abundantly. Death will be forgotten, joy will be universal, Elijah will return."

"But he has!"

Antipas started. The Scribe trembled with rage. But the throng had caught the name of Elijah, and knew to whom the disputant referred—a man in tattered furs whom a few hours before they had seen dragged away by a negro naked to the waist, and some one shouted:

"Iohanan is Elijah."

Baba Barbulah stood up and turned to whence the voice had come:

"In the footprints of the Anointed impudence shall increase, and the face of the generation shall be as the face of a dog. It may be," he added, significantly —"it may be that you speak the truth."

The sarcasm was lost. The musicians

in the gallery, who had been playing on flute and timbrel, began now on the psalteron and the native sambuca. Behind was a row of lute-players; but most in view was a trignon, an immense Egyptian harp, at which with nimble fingers a fair girl plucked.

In the shadow Herodias leaned. At a signal from her the musicians attacked the prelude of a Syrian dance, and in the midst of the assemblage a figure veiled from head to foot suddenly appeared. For a moment it stood very still; then the veil fell of itself, and from the garrison a shout went up:

"Salomè! Salomè!"

Her hair, after an archaic Chanaanite fashion, was arranged in the form of a tower. Her high bosom was wound about with protecting bands. Her waist was bare. She wore long pink drawers of silk, and for girdle she had the blue buds of the lotus, which are symbols of virginity. She was young and exquisitely formed. In her face you read strange records, and on her lips were promises as

rare. Her eyes were tortoise-shell, her hair was black as guilt.

The prelude had ceased, the movement quickened. With a gesture of abandonment the girl threw her head back, and, her arms extended, she fluttered like a butterfly on a rose. She ran forward. The sambuca rang quicker, the harp quicker yet. She threw herself to one side, then to the other, her hips swaying as she moved. The buds at her girdle fell one by one; she was dancing on flowers, her hips still swaying, her waist advancing and retreating to the shiver of the harp. She was elusive as dream, subtle as love; she intoxicated and entranced; and finally, as she threw herself on her hands, her feet, first in the air and then slowly descending, touched the ground, while her body straightened like a reed, there was a long growl of unsatisfied content.

She was kneeling now before the dais. Pilate compared her to Bathylle, a mime whom he had applauded at Rome. The tetrarch was purple; he gnawed his

under lip. For the moment he forgot everything he should have remembered —the presence of his guests, the stains of his household, his wife even, whose daughter this girl was—and in a gust of passion he half rose from his couch.

"Come to me," he cried. "But come to me, and ask whatever you will."

Salomè hesitated and pouted, the point of her tongue protruding between her lips.

"Come to me," he pleaded; "you shall have slaves and palaces and cities; you shall have hills and intervales. I will give you anything; half my kingdom if you wish."

There was a tinkle of feet; the girl had gone. In a moment she returned, and balancing herself on one foot, she lisped very sweetly: "I should like by and by to have you give me the head of Iohanan—" she looked about; in the distance a eunuch was passing, a dish in his hand, and she added, "on a platter."

Antipas jumped as though a hound under the table had bitten him on the

leg. He turned to the procurator, who regarded him indifferently, and to the emir, who was toying with Mary's agate-nailed hand. He had given his word, however; the people had heard. About his ears the perspiration started; from purple he had grown very gray.

Salomè still stood, balancing herself on one foot, the point of her tongue just visible, while from the gallery beyond, in whose shadows he divined the instigating presence of Herodias, came the grave music of an Hebraic hymn.

"So be it," he groaned.

The order was given, and a tear trickled down through the paint and furrows of his cheek. On the hall a silence had descended. The guests were waiting, and the throb of the harp accentuated the suspense. Presently there was the clatter of men-at-arms, and a negro, naked to the waist, appeared, an axe in one hand, the head of the prophet in the other.

He presented it deferentially to Antipas, who motioned it away, his face

averted. Salomè smiled. She took it, and then, while she resumed her veil, she put it down before the emir, who eyed it with the air of one that has seen many another object such as that.

But in a moment the veil was adjusted, and with the trophy the girl disappeared.

The harp meanwhile had ceased to sob, the guests were departing; already the procurator had gone. The emir looked about for Mary, but she also had departed; and, with the expectation, perhaps, of finding her without, he too got up and left the hall.

Antipas was alone. Through the lattice at his side he could see the baaras in the basalt emitting its firefly sparks of flame. From an adjacent corridor came the discreet click-clack of a sandal, and in a moment the head of the prophet was placed on the table at which he lay. The tetrarch leaned over and gazed into the unclosed eyes. They were haggard and dilated, and they seemed to curse.

He put his hand to his face and tried to think—to forget rather, and not to re-

member; but his ears were charged with rustlings that extended indefinitely and lost themselves in the future; his mind peopled itself with phantoms of the past. Perhaps he dozed a little. When he looked up again the head was no longer there, and he told himself that Herodias had thrown it to the swine.

CHAPTER III.

III.

In the distance the white and yellow limestone of the mountains rose. Near by was a laughter of flowers, a tumult of green. Just beyond, in a border of sedge and rushes, a lake lay, a mirror to the sky. In the background were the blue and white terraces of Magdala, and about a speaker were clustered a handful of people, a group of laborers and of fishermen.

He was dressed as a rabbi, but he looked like a seer. In his face was the youth of the world, in his eyes the infinite. As he spoke, his words thrilled and his presence allured. "Repent," he was saying; "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And as the resplendent prophecy continued, you would have said that a bird in his heart had burst into song.

A little to one side, in an attitude of

amused contempt, a few of the tetrarch's courtiers stood; they were dressed in the Roman fashion, and one, Pandera, a captain of the guard, wore a cuirass that glittered as he laughed. He was young and very handsome. He had white teeth, red lips, a fair skin, a dark beard, and, as he happened to be stationed in the provinces, an acquired sneer. Dear old Rome, how vague it was! And as he jested with his comrades he thought of its delights, and wished himself either back again in the haunts he loved, or else, if he must be separated from them, then, instead of vegetating in a tiresome tetrarchy, he felt that it would be pleasant to be far off somewhere, where the uncouth Britons were, a land which it took a year of adventures to reach; on the banks of the Betis, whence the girls came that charmed the lupanars; in Numidia, where the hunting was good; or in Thrace, where there was blood in plenty—anywhere, in fact, save on the borders of the beautiful lake where he happened to be.

It was but the restlessness of youth,

perhaps, that disturbed him so, for in Galilee there were oafs as awkward as any that Britannia could show; there was game in abundance; blood, too, was not as infrequent as it might have been; and as for women, there at his side stood one as appetizing as Rome, Spain even, had produced. He turned to her now, and plucked at his dark beard and showed his white teeth; he had caught a phrase of the rabbi in which the latter had mentioned the kingdoms of the earth, and the phrase amused him.

"I like that," he said. "What does he know about the kingdoms of the earth? Mary, I wager what you will that he has never been two leagues from where he stands. Let's ask and see."

But Mary did not seem to hear. She was engrossed in the rabbi, and Pandera had to tug at her sleeve before she consented to return to a life in which he seemingly had a part.

"What do you say?" he asked.

Mary shook her head. She had the air of one whose mind is elsewhere. Into

her face a vacancy had come; she seemed incapable of reply; and as the guardsman scrutinized her it occurred to him that she might be on the point of having an attack of that catalepsy to which he knew her to be subject. But immediately she reassured him.

"Come, let us go."

And, the guardsman at her side, the others in her train, she ascended the little hill on which her castle was, and where the midday meal awaited.

It was a charming residence. Built quadrangularwise, the court held a fountain which was serviceable to those that wished to bathe. The roof was a garden. The interior façade was of teak wood, carved and colored; the frontal was of stone. Seen from the exterior it looked the fortress of some umbrageous prince, but in the courtyard reigned the seduction of a woman in love. From without it menaced, within it soothed.

Her title to it was a matter of doubt. According to Pandera, who at the messtable at Tiberias had boasted his pos-

session of her confidence, it was a heritage from her father. Others declared that it had been given her by her earliest lover, an old man who since had passed away. Yet, after all, no one cared. She kept open house; the tetrarch held her in high esteem; she was attached to the person of the tetrarch's wife; only a little before, the emir of Tadmor had made a circuitous journey to visit her; Vitellius, the governor of the province, had stopped time and again beneath her roof; and—and here was the point—to see her was to acquire a new conception of beauty. Of human flowers she was the most fair.

Yet now, during the meal that followed, Mary, the toast of the tetrarchy, she whose wit and brilliance had been echoed even in Rome, wrapped herself in a mantle of silence. The guardsman jested in vain. To the others she paid as much attention as the sun does to a torch; and when at last Pandera, annoyed, perhaps, at her disregard of a quip of his, attempted to whisper in her ear, she left the room.

The nausea of the hour may have affected her, for presently, as she threw herself on her great couch, her thoughts forsook the present and went back into the past, her childhood returned, and faces that she had loved reappeared and smiled. Her father, for instance, Theudas, who had been satrap of Syria, and her mother, Eucharia, a descendant of former kings.

But of these her memories were slight —they had died when she was still very young—and in their place came her sister, Martha, kind of heart and quick of temper, obdurate, indulgent, and continually perplexed; Simon, Martha's husband, a Libyan, born in Cyrene, called by many the Leper because of a former whiteness of his skin, a whiteness which had long since vanished, for he was brown as a date; Eleazer, her brother, younger than herself, a delicate boy with blue pathetic eyes; and with them came the delight of Bethany, that lovely village on the oriental slope of the Mount of Olives, where the rich of Jerusalem had their

villas, and where her girlhood had been passed.

From the lattice at which she used to sit she could see the wide white road begin its descent to the Jordan, a stretch of almond trees and oleanders; and just beyond, in a woody hollow, a little house in which Sephôrah lived—a woman who came from no one knew where, and to whom Martha had forbidden her to speak.

She could see her still, a gaunt, gray creature, with projecting cheek-bones, a skin of brick, and a low, insinuating voice. The fascination which she had exercised over her partook both of wonder and of fear, for it was rumored that she was a sorceress, and as old as the world. To Mary, who was then barely nubile, and inquisitive as only fanciful children are, she manifested a great affection, enticing her to her dwelling with little cakes that were sweet to the tooth and fabulous tales that stirred the heart: the story of Stratonice and Combabus, for instance, which Mary did not in the least

understand, but which seemed to her intensely sad.

"And then what?" she would ask when the tale was done; and the woman would tell her of Ninus and Semiramis, of Sennachereb, of Sardanapalus, Belsarazzur, of Dagon, the fish-god of Philistia, by whom Goliath swore and in whose temple Samson died, or of Sargon, who, placed by his mother in an ark of rushes, was set adrift in the Euphrates, yet, happily discovered by a water-carrier, afterwards became a leader of men.

"Why, that was Moses!" the child would exclaim.

"No, no," the woman invariably answered, "it was Sargon."

But that which pleasured Mary more highly even than these tales were the legends of Hither Asia, the wonderlands of Babylon, and particularly the story of the creation, for always the human mind has wished to read the book of God.

"Where did they say the world came from?" she would ask.

And Sephôrah, drawing a long breath,

would answer: "Once all was darkness and water. In this chaos lived strange animals, and men with two wings, and others with four wings and two faces. Some had the thighs of goats, some had horns, and some had horses' feet, or were formed behind like a horse and in front like a man; there were bulls with human faces, and men with the heads of dogs, and other animals of human shape with fins like fishes, and fishes like sirens, and dragons, and creeping things, and serpents, and fierce creatures, the images of which are preserved in the temple of Bel.

"Over all these ruled the great mother, Um Uruk. But Bel, whom your people call Baal, divided the darkness and clove the woman asunder. Of one part he made the earth, and of the other the sun, the moon, the planets. He drew off the water, apportioned it to the land, and prepared and arranged the world. The creatures on it could not endure the light of day and became extinct.

"Now when Bel saw the land fruitful yet uninhabited, he cut off his head and

made one of the gods mingle the blood which flowed from it with earth and form therewith men and animals that could endure the sun. Presently Chaldæa was plentifully populated, but the inhabitants lived like animals, without order or rule. Then there appeared to them from the sea a monster of the name of Yan. Its body was that of a fish, but under its head another head was attached, and on its fins were feet, and its voice was that of a man. Its image is still preserved. It came at morning, passed the day, and taught language and science, the harvesting of seeds and of fruits, the rules for the boundaries of land, the mode of building cities and temples, arts and writing and all that pertains to civilized life, and for four hundred and thirty-two thousand years the world went very well.

"Then in a dream Bel revealed to Xisuthrus that there would be a great storm, and men would be destroyed. He bade him bury in Sepharvaim, the city of the sun, all the ancient, mediæval, and modern records, and build a ship and

embark in it with his kindred and his nearest friends. He was also to take food and drink into the ship, and pairs of all creatures winged and four-footed.

"Xisuthrus did as he was bidden, and from the ends of heaven the storm began to blow. Bin thundered; Nebo, the Revealer, came forth; Nergal, the Destroyer, overthrew; and Adar, the Sublime, swept in his brightness across the earth. The storm devoured the nations, it lapped the sky, turned the land into an ocean, and destroyed everything that lived. Even the gods were afraid. They sought refuge in the heaven of Anu, sovereign of the upper realms. As hounds draw in their tails, they seated themselves on their thrones, and to them Mylitta, the great goddess, spake: 'The world has turned from me, and ruin I have proclaimed.' She wept, and the gods on their thrones wept with her.

"On the seventh day Xisuthrus perceived that the storm had abated and that the sea had begun to fall. He sent out a dove, it returned; next, a swallow,

which also returned, but with mud on its feet; and again, a raven, which saw the corpses in the water and ate them, and returned no more. Then the boat was stayed and settled upon Mount Nasir. Xisuthrus went out and worshipped the recovered earth. When his companions went in search of him he had disappeared, but his voice called to them saying that for his piety he had been carried away; that he was dwelling among the gods; and that they were to return to Sepharvaim and dig up the books and give them to mankind. Which they did, and erected many cities and temples, and rebuilt Babylon and Mylitta's shrine."

"It is simpler in Genesis," Mary said, the first time she heard this marvellous tale. For to her, as to Martha and Eleazer, the khazzan, the teacher of the synagogue, had read from the great square letters in which the Pentateuch was written another account of the commingling of Chaos and of Light.

At the mention of the sacred canon, Sephôrah would smile with that indul-

gence which wisdom brings, and smooth her scanty plaits, and draw the back of her hand across her mouth.

"Burned on tiles in the land of the magi are the records of a million years. In the unpolluted tombs of Osorapi the history of life and of time is written on the cerements of kings. Where the bells ring at the neck of the camels of Iran is a stretch of columns on which are inscribed the words of those that lived in Paradise. On a wall of the temple of Bel are the chronicles of creation; in the palace of Assurbanipal, the narrative of the flood. It is from these lands and monuments the Thorah comes; its verses are made of their memories; it gathered whatever it found, and overlooked the essential, immortal life."

And Sephôrah added in a whisper, "For we are descended from gods, and immortal as they."

The khazzan had disclosed to Mary no such prospect as that. To him as to all orthodox expounders of the Law man was essentially evanescent; he lived his

little day and disappeared forever. God alone was immortal, and an immortal being would be God. The contrary beliefs of the Egyptians and the Aryans were to them abominations, and the spiritualistic doctrine inaugurated by Juda Maccabæus and accepted by the Pharisees, an impiety. The Pentateuch had not a word on the subject. Moses had expressly declared that secret things belong to the Lord, and only visible things to man. The prophets had indeed foretold a terrestrial immortality, but that immortality was the immortality of a nation; and the realization of their prophecy the entire people awaited. Apart from that there was only Sheol, a sombre region of the under-earth, to which the dead descended, and there remained without consciousness, abandoned by God.

"Immortal!" Mary, with great wondering eyes, would echo. "Immortal!"

"Yes; but to become so," Sephôrah replied, "you must worship at another shrine."

"Where is it?"

Sephôrah answered evasively. Mary would find it in time—when the spring came, perhaps; and meanwhile she had a word or two to say of Baal to such effect even that Mary questioned the khazzan.

"However great the god of the Gentiles has been imagined," the khazzan announced, "he is bounded by the earth and the sky. His feet may touch the one, his head the other, but of nature he is a part, and, to the Eternal, nature is not even a garment, it is a substance He made, and which He can remould at will. It is not in nature, it is in light, He is: in the burning bush in which He revealed Himself; in the stake at which Isaac would have died; in the lightning in which the Law was declared, the column of fire, the flame of the sacrifices, and the gleaming throne in which Isaiah saw Him sit—it is there that He is, and His shadow is the sun."

Of this Mary repeated the substance to her friend, and Sephôrah mused.

"No," she said at last—"no, he is not

in light, but in the desert where nature is absent, and where the world has ceased to be. The threats of a land that never smiled are reflected in his face. The sight of him is death. No, Baal is the sun-god. His eyes fecundate."

And during the succeeding months Sephôrah entertained Mary with Assyrian annals and Egyptian lore. She told her more of Baal, whose temple was in Babylon, and of Baaltis, who reigned at Ascalon. She told her of the women who wept for Tammuz, and explained the reason of their tears. She told her of the union of Ptah, the unbegotten begetter of the first beginning, and of Neith, mother of the sun; of the holy incest of Isis and Osiris; and of Luz, called by the patriarchs Bethel, the House of God, the foothold of a straight stairway which messengers ceaselessly ascended and descended, and at whose summit the Elohim sat.

She told her of these things, of others as well; and now and then in the telling of them a fat little man with beady eyes

would wander in, the smell of garlic about him, and stare at Mary's lips. His name was Pappus; by Sephôrah he was treated with great respect, and Mary learned that he was rich and knew that Sephôrah was poor.

When the Passover had come and gone, Sephôrah detected that Mary had ceased to be a child; and of the gods and goddesses with whose adventures she was wont to entertain her, gradually she confined herself to Mylitta; and in describing the wonderlands which she knew so well, she spoke now only of Babylon, where the great tower was, and the gardens that hung in the air.

It was all very marvellous and beautiful, and Sephôrah described it in fitting terms. There was the Temple of the Seven Spheres, where the priests offered incense to the Houses of the Planets, to the whole host of heaven, and to Bel, Lord of the Sky. There was the Home of the Height, a sheer flight of solid masonry extending vertiginously, and surmounted by turrets of copper capped with gold.

In its utmost pinnacle were a sanctuary and a dazzling couch. There the priests said that sometimes Bel came and rested. For the truth of that statement, however, Sephôrah declined to vouch. She had never seen him ; but the hanging gardens she had seen, long before they were demolished. She had walked in them, and she described their loveliness, and related that they were erected to pleasure a Persian princess whose eyes had wearied of the monotony of the Babylonian plain.

Once when Pappus was present—and latterly he had been often there—she passed from the gardens to the grove where the temple of Mylitta stood. At the steps of the shrine, she declared, were white-winged lions, and immense bulls with human heads. Within were dovecotes and cisterns, the emblems of fecundity, and a block of stone which she did not describe. Without, among the terebinths and evergreens, were little cabins and an avenue bordered by cypress trees, in which men with pointed hats and long embroidered gowns passed slowly, for

there the maidens of Babylon sat, chapleted with cords, burning bran for perfume, awaiting the will of the first who should toss a coin in their lap and in the name of Mylitta invite them to perform the sacred rite.

"That," said Sephôrah, "is the worship Mylitta exacts." As she spoke she drew herself up, her height increased, an unnatural splendor filled her eyes. "I," she continued, "am her priestess. I sacrificed at Byblus, but you may sacrifice here. There is a dovecote, yonder is a cistern, beyond are the cypress and the evergreens that she loves. Mary, do you wish to be immortal? Do you see the way?"

Mary smiled vaguely, and with the serenity of one worshipping a divinity she suffered the fat Jerusalemite to take her in his arms.

And now as she lay on her great couch these things returned to her, and subsequent episodes as well. There had been the lamentable grief of Martha, the added pathos in her brother's eyes. The

estate of her father had been divided, and the castle of Magdala had fallen to her share. Meanwhile she had been at Jerusalem, and from there she had journeyed to Antioch, where she had heard the beasts roar in the arena. She had looked on blood, on the honey-colored moon that effaced the stars, and everywhere she had encountered love.

Since then her hours had been grooved in revolving circles of alternating delights, and delights to which no shadow of regret had come. To her, youth had been a chalice of aromatic wine. She had drained it and found no dregs. Day had been interwoven with splendors, and night with the rays of the sun. Where she passed she conquered; when she smiled there were slaves ready-made. There had been hot brawls where she trod, the gleam of white knives. Men had killed each other because of her eyes, and women had wept themselves to death. For her a priest had gone mad, and a betrothed had hid herself

in the sea. In Hierapolis the galli had fancied her Ashtaroth; and at Capri, where Tiberius lounged, a villa awaited her will.

Her life had indeed been full, yet that morning its nausea had mounted to her heart. At the words of the rabbi the horizon had expanded, the dream of immortality returned. It had been forgot long since and abandoned, but now, for the first time since her childhood, something there was which admonished her that perhaps she still might stroll through lands where dreams come true. The path was not wholly clear as yet, and as in her troubled mind she tried to disentangle the past from the present the sun went down behind the castle, the crouching shadows elongated and possessed the walls.

An echo came to her, Repent, and the prophecy continuing danced in her ears; yet still the way was obscure. In the echo she divined merely that the past must be put from her like a garment that is stained. The rest was vague.

Then suddenly she was back again in Machærus, and she heard the ringing words of John. Could this be the Messiah her nation awaited? was there a kingdom coming, and immortality too?

Her thoughts entangled and grew confused. There was a murmur of harps in the distance, and she wondered whence it could come. Some one was speaking; she tried to rouse herself and listen. The room was filled with bats that changed to butterflies. The murmur of harps continued, and through the wall before her issued a litter in which a woman lay.

A circle of slaves surrounded her. She was pale, and her eyes closed languorously. "I am Indolence," she said. "Sleep is not softer than my couch. My lightest wish is law to kings. I live on perfumes; my days are as shadows on glass. Mary, come with me, and I will teach you to forget."

She vanished, and where the litter had been stood a eunuch. "I am Envy," he said, and his eyes drooped sullenly.

"I separate those that love; I dismantle altars and dismember nations. I corrode and corrupt; I destroy, and I never rebuild. My joy is malice, and my creed false-witnessing. Mary, come with me, and you will learn to hate."

He disappeared, and where his slime had dripped stood a being with fingers intertwisted and a back that bent. "I am Greed," it said. "I sap the veins of youth; I drain the hearts of women; I bring contention where peace should be. I make fathers destroy their sons, and daughters betray their mother. I never forget, and I never release. I am the master. Mary, come with me, and you shall own the world."

The fetor of the presence went, and in its place came one whose footsteps thundered. "I am Anger," he declared. "I exterminate and rejoice. I batten on blood. In my heart is suspicion, in my hand is flame. It is I that am war and disaster and regret. My breath consumes, and my voice affrights. Mary, come with me, and you will learn to quell."

He dissolved, and in the shadows stood one whose hands were ample, and whose wide mouth laughed. "I am Gluttony," he announced, and as he spoke his voice was thick. "I fatten and forsake. I offer satrapies for one new dish. I invite and alienate, I welcome and repel. It is I that bring disease and disorders. I am the harbinger of Death. Mary, come with me, and you shall taste of Life."

He also disappeared, and two heralds entered with trumpets on which they blew, and one exclaimed, "Make way for Assurbanipal, ruler of land and of sea." Then, with horsemen riding royally, Sardanapalus advanced through the fissure in the wall. On his head a high and wonderful tiara shone with zebras that had wings and horns. His hair was long, and his beard curled in overlapping rings. His robe dazzled, and the close sleeves were fastened over his knuckles with bracelets of precious stones. In one hand he held a sceptre, in the other a chart.

"I," he cried—"I am Assurbanipal;

the progeny of Assur and of Baaltis, son of the great king Riduti, whom the lord of crowns, in days remote prophesying in his name, raised to the kingdom, and in the womb of his mother created to rule. The man of war, the joy of Assur and of Istar, the royal offspring, am I. When the gods seated me on the throne of the father my begetter, Bin poured down his rain, Hea feasted the people. My enemies I destroyed, and their gods glorified me before my camp. The god of their oracles, whose image no man had seen, I took, and the goddesses whom the kings worshipped I dishonored."

He paused and looked proudly about, then he continued:

"That which is in the storehouse of heaven is kindled, and to the city of cities my glory flies. The queens above and below proclaim my glory. I *am* Glory, and I am Pride. Mary, come with me, and you shall disdain the sky."

But Mary gave no sign. The clattering horses vanished, and two men dressed in

women's clothes appeared. They bowed to the ground and chanted:

"The holy goddess, our Lady Mylitta, whose sacrificants we are."

Then came a form so luminous that Mary hid her face and listened merely.

"I," said a voice—"I am Desire. In Greece I am revered, and there I am Aphrodite. In Italy I am Venus; in Egypt, Hathor; in Armenia, Anaitis; in Persia, Anâhita; Tanit in Carthage; Baaltis in Byblus; Derceto in Ascalon; Atargatis in Hierapolis; Bilet in Babylon; Ashtaroth to the Sidonians; and Aschera in the glades of Judæa. And everywhere I am worshipped, and everywhere I am Love. I bring joy and torture, delight and pain. I appease and appal. It is I that create and undo. It is I that make heaven and people hell. I am the mistress of the world. Without me time would cease to be. I am the germ of stars, the essence of things. I am all that is, will be, and has been, and my robe no mortal has raised. I breathe, and nations are; in my parturitions are planets;

my home is space. My lips are bliss-fuller than any bloom of bliss; my arms the opening gates of life. The Infinite is mine. Mary, come with me, and you shall measure it."

When Mary ventured to look again the vision had gone. They had all gone now. She had made no effort to detain them. They were tempters of which she was freed, in which she believed, and which were real to her. The wall through which they had come and departed was vague and in the darkness remote, but presently it dissolved again, and afar in the beckoning distance was one breathing a soul into decrepit rites. "Come unto me, all ye that sorrow and are heavy-laden," she heard him say; and, as with a great sob of joy she rose to that gracious summons, night seized her. When she awoke, a newer dawn had come.

CHAPTER IV.

IV.

In the gardens of the palace the tetrarch mused. The green parasols of the palms formed an avenue, and down that avenue now and then he looked. Near him a Syrian bear, quite tame, with a sweet face and tufted silver fur, gambolled prodigiously. Up and down a neighboring tree two lemurs chased with that grace and diabolic vivacity which those enchanting animals alone possess. Ringed-horned antelopes, the ankles slender as the stylus, the eyes timid and trustful, pastured just beyond; and there too a black-faced ape, irritated perhaps by the lemurs, turned indignant somersaults, the tender coloring of his body glistening in the sun.

"It is odd that Pahul does not return," the tetrarch reflected; and then, it may be for consolation's sake, he plunged his face

in a jar of wine that had been drained, in accordance with a recipe of Vitellius, through cinnamon and calamus, and drank abundantly.

Long since he had deserted Machærus. The legends that peopled its corridors had beset him with a sense of reality which before they had never possessed. The leaves of the baaras glittered frenetically in the basalt, and in their spectral light a phantom with eyes that cursed came and went. At night he had drunk, and in the clear forenoons he paced the terrace fancying always that there, beyond in the desert, Aretas prowled like a wolf. Machærus was unhealthy; men had gone mad there, others had disappeared entirely. It was a haunt of echoes, of memories, of ghosts also, perhaps too of reproach. And so, with his court, he returned to his brand-new Tiberias, where the air was serener, and nature laughed.

And yet in the gardens that leaned to the lake the tranquillity he had anticipated eluded and declined to be detained. Rumors that Herodias collected came to

him with the stamp of Rome. One of his brothers was plotting against him; another, though in exile, was plotting too. It was the Herod blood, his wife said; and, with the intemperance of a woman whose ambition has been deceived, she taunted him with his plebeian descent. "Your grandfather was a sweep at Ascalon, a eunuch at that," she had remarked; and the tetrarch, by way of reply, had been obliged to content himself by asking how, in that case, he could have been grandfather at all.

But latterly a new source of inquietude had come. At Magdala, Capharnahum, Bethsaïda, there, within the throw of a stone, was a Nazarene going about inciting the peasants to revolt. It was very vexatious, and he told himself that when an annoyance fades another appears. Life, it occurred to him, was a brier with renascent thorns. And now, as he gargled the wine that left a pink foam on his lips, even that irritation lapsed in the perplexing absence of Pahul.

Pahul was a butler of his, a Greek

whom he had picked up one adventurous night in Rome, who had made himself useful, whom he had attached to his household, whom he consulted, and on whom he relied. Early that day he had sent him off with instructions to run the demagogue to earth, to listen, to question if need were, and to hurry back and report. But as yet he had not returned. The day was fading, and on the amphitheatre which the hills made the sun seemed to balance itself, the disk blood-red. The lemurs had tired, perhaps; their yellow eyes and circled tails had gone; the bear had been led away; only the multicolored ape remained, gnawing now with little plaintive moans at a bit of fruit which he held suspiciously in his wrinkled hand.

Presently a star appeared and quivered, then another came, and though overhead were streaks of pink, and, where the sun had been, a violence of red and orange, the east retained its cobalt, night still was remote—an echo of crotals from the neighboring faubourg, the cry of

elephants impatient for their fodder, alone indicating that a day was dead.

In the charm of the encroaching twilight the irritation of the tetrarch waned and decreased. He lost himself in memories of the princess who had been his bride, and he wondered were it possible that, despite the irrevocable, he was never to see, to speak, to hold her to him again. Truly her grievance was unmeasurable, the more so even that she had not deigned to utter so much as a reproach. At the rumor of his treachery she had betaken herself to the solitudes, where Aretas her father was king, and had there remained girt in that unmurmuring silence which nobility raises as a barrier between outrage and itself, and which the desert is alone competent to suggest.

"It is he!"

The tetrarch started so abruptly that he narrowly missed the jar at his side. On noiseless sandals Pahul had approached, and stood before him nodding his head with an air of assured conviction.

The ape had fled and a stork stepped gingerly away.

"It is he," the Greek repeated—"John the Baptist."

Antipas plucked at his beard. "But he is dead," he gasped; "I beheaded him. What nonsense you talk!"

"It is he, I tell you, only grown younger. I found him in the synagogue."

"Where? what synagogue?"

Pahul made a gesture. "At Capharnahum," he answered, and gazed in the tetrarch's face. He was slight of form and regular of feature. As a lad he had crossed bare-handed from Cumæ to Rhegium, and from there drifted to Rome, where he started a commerce in Bœtican girls which had so far prospered that he bought two vessels to carry the freight. Unfortunately the vessels met in a storm and sank. Then he became a hanger-on of the circus; in idle moments a tout. It was in the latter capacity that Antipas met him, and, pleased with his shrewdness and perfect corruption, had attached him to his house. This had occurred in years

previous, and as yet Antipas had found no cause to regret the trust imposed. He was a useful braggart, idle, familiar, and discreet; and he had acquired the dialect of the country with surprising ease.

"There were any number of people," Pahul continued. "Some said he was the son of Joseph, the son of——"

"But he, what did he say? How tiresome you are!"

"Ah!" And Pahul swung his arms. "Who is Mammon?"

"Mammon? Mammon? How do I know? Plutus, I suppose. What about him?"

"And who is Satan?"

"Satan? Satan is a— He's a Jew god. Why? But what do you mean by asking me questions?"

Pahul nodded absently. "I heard him say," he continued, "that no man could serve God and Mammon. At first I thought he meant you. It was this way. I got into conversation with a friend of his, a man named Judas. He told me any

number of things about him, that he cured the sick——"

"Bah! Some Greek physician."

"That he walks on the sea——"

"Nonsense!"

"That he turns water into wine, feeds the multitude, raises the dead——"

"Raises the dead!" And the tetrarch added in the *sotto voce* of thought, "So did Elijah."

"That he had been in the desert——"

"With Aretas?"

"No; I questioned him on that point. He had never heard of Aretas, but he said that in the desert this Satan had come and offered him—what do you suppose? *The empire of the earth!*"

Antipas shook with fright. "It must have been Aretas."

"But that he had refused."

"Then it is John."

"There, you see." And Pahul dandled himself with the air of one who is master of logic. "That's what I said myself. I said this: 'If he can raise the dead, he can raise himself.'"

"It *is* John," the tetrarch repeated.

"I am sure of it," the butler continued. "But he did not say so. Judas didn't either. On the contrary, he declared he was not. He said John was not good enough to carry his shoes. I saw through that, though," and Pahul leered; "he knew whom I was, and he lied to protect his friend. I of course pretended to believe him."

"Quite right," said the tetrarch.

"Yes, I played the fool. H'm, where was I? Oh, I asked Judas who then his friend was, but he went over to where a woman stood; he spoke to her; she moved away. Some of the others seemed to reprove him. I would have followed, but at that moment his friend stood up; a khazzan offered him a scroll, but he waved it aside; then some one asked him a question which I did not catch; another spoke to him; a third interrupted; he seemed to be arguing with them. I was too far away to hear well, andI got nearer; then I heard him say, 'I am the bread of life.' Now, what did he mean by that?"

Antipas had no explanation to offer.

"Then," Pahul continued, "he said he had come down from heaven. A man near me exclaimed, 'He is the Messiah;' but others——"

"The Messiah!" echoed the tetrarch. For a moment his thoughts stammered, then at once he was back in the citadel. On one side was the procurator, on the other the emir of Tadmor. In front of him was a drunken rabble, wrangling Pharisees, and one man dominating the din with an announcement of the Messiah's approach. The murmur of lutes threaded through it all; and now, as his thoughts deviated, he wondered could that announcement have been the truth.

"But others," Pahul continued, "objected loudly. For a little I could not catch a word. At last they became quieter, and I heard him repeat that he was the bread of life, adding, 'Your fathers ate manna and are dead, but this bread a man may eat of and never die.' At this there was new contention. A woman fainted—the one to whom Judas had

spoken. They carried her out. As she passed I could see her face. It was Mary of Magdala. Judas held her by the waist, another her feet."

Antipas drew a hand across his face. "It is impossible," he muttered.

"Not impossible at all. I saw her as plainly as I see you. The man next to me said that the Rabbi had cast from her seven devils. Moreover, Johanna was there—yes, yes, the wife of Khuza, your steward; it was she, I remember now, who had her by the feet. And there were others that I recognized, and others that the man next to me pointed out: Zabdia, a well-to-do fisherman whom I have seen time and again, and with him his sons James and John, and Salomè his wife. Then, too, there were Simon Barjona and Andrew his brother. Simon had his wife with him, his children, and his mother-in-law. The man next to me said that the Rabbi called James and John the Sons of Thunder, and Simon a stone. There was Mathias the tax-gatherer, Philip of Bethsaïda, Joseph Bar-

saba, Mary Clopas, Susannah, Nathaniel of Cana, Thomas, Thaddeus, Aristian the custom-house officer, Ruth the tax-gatherer's wife, mechanics from Scythopolis, and Scribes from Jerusalem."

The fingers of Antipas' hand glittered with jewels. He played with them nervously. The sky seemed immeasurably distant. For some little time it had been hesitating between different shades of blue, but now it chose a fathomless indigo; Night unloosed her draperies, and, with the prodigality of a queen who reigns only when she falls, flung out upon them uncounted stars.

Pahul continued: "And many of them seemed to be at odds with each other. They wrangled so that often I could not distinguish a word. Some of them left the synagogue. The Rabbi himself must have been vexed, for in a lull I heard him say to those who were nearest, 'Will you also go away?' Judas came in at that moment, and he turned to him: 'Have I not chosen twelve, and is not one of you a devil?' Judas came forward at once and

protested. I could see he was in earnest, and meant what he said. The man next told me that he was devoted to the Rabbi. Then Simon Barjona, in answer to his question, called out, 'To whom should we go? Thou art Christ, the Son of God.'"

Antipas had ceased to listen. At the mention of the Messiah the dream of Israel had returned, and with it the pageants of its faith unrolled.

Behind the confines of history, in the naked desert he saw a bedouin, austere and grandiose, preparing the tenets of a nation's creed; in the remoter past a shadow in which there was lightning, then the splendor of that first dawn where the future opened like a book, and in the grammar of the Eternal the promise of an age of gold.

Through the echo of succeeding generations came the rumor of that initial impulse which drew the world in its flight. The bedouin had put the desert behind him, and stared at another. Where the sand had been was the sea. As he passed, the land leapt into life. There were

tents and passions, clans not men, an aggregate of forces in which the unit disappeared. For chieftain there was Might; and above, the subjects of impersonal verbs, the Elohim from whom the thunder came, the rain, light and darkness, death and birth, dream too, and nightmare as well. The clans migrated. Goshen called. In its heart Chaldæa spoke. The Elohim vanished, and there was El, the one great god, and Isra-el, the great god's elect. From heights that lost themselves in immensity the ineffable name, incommunicable and never to be pronounced, was seared by forked flames on a tablet of stone. A nation learned that El was Jehovah, that they were in his charge, that he was omnipotent, and that the world was theirs.

They had a law, a covenant, a future, and a god; and as they passed into the lands of the well-beloved, leaving tombs and altars to mark their passage, they had battle-cries that frightened and hymns that exalted the heart. Above were the jealous eyes of Jehovah, and beyond

was the resplendent to-morrow. They ravaged the land like hailstones. They had the whirlwind for ally; the moon was their servant; and to aid them the sun stood still. The terror of Sinai gleamed from their breastplates; men could not see their faces and live. They encroached and conquered. They had a home, they made a capitol, and there on a rock-bound hill Antipas saw David founding a line of kings, and Solomon the city of god.

It was in their loins the Messiah was; in them the apex of a nation's prosperity; in them glory at its apogee. And across that tableau of might, of splendor, and of submission for one second flitted the silhouette of that dainty princess of Utopia, the Queen of Sheba, bringing riddles, romance, and riches to the wise young king.

She must have been very beautiful, Antipas with melancholy retrospection reflected; and he fancied her more luminous than the twelve signs of the zodiac, lounging nonchalantly in a palanquin that a white elephant with swaying tail bal-

anced on his painted back. And even as she returned, with a child perhaps, to the griffons of the fabulous Yemen whence she came, Antipas noted a speck on the horizon that grew from minim into mountain, and obscured the entire sky. He saw the empire split in twain, and in the twin halves that formed the perfect whole, a concussion of armies, brothers appealing against their kin, the flight of the Ideal.

Unsummoned before him paraded the regicides, convulsions, and anarchies that deified Hatred until Vengeance incarnate talked Assyrian, and Nebuchadnezzar loomed above the desert beyond. His statue filled the perspective. With one broad hand he overturned Jerusalem; with another he swept a nation into captivity, leaving in derision a pigmy for King of Solitude behind, and, blowing the Jews into Babylon, there retained them until it occurred to Cyrus to change the Euphrates' course.

By the light of that legend Antipas saw an immense hall, illuminated by the seven

branches of countless candelabra, and filled with revellers celebrating a monarch's feast. Beyond, through retreating columns, were cyclopean arches and towers whose summits were lost in clouds that the lightning rent. At the royal table sat Belsarazzur, laughing mightily at the enterprise of the Persian king; about him were the grandees of his court, the flower of his concubines; at his side were the sacred vases filled with wine. He raised one to his lips, and there on the frieze before him leapt out the flaming letters of his doom, while to the trumpetings of heralds Cyrus and his army beat down the city's gates.

It passed, and Antipas saw Jerusalem repeopled, the Temple rebuilt, peace after exile, the joy of bondage unloosed. For a moment it lasted—a century or two at most; and after Alexander, in chasing kings hither and thither, had passed with his huntsmen that way, Isis and Osiris beckoned, and the descendants of the bedouin belonged to Goshen again, and so remained until Syria took them, lost them,

reconquered them, and might have done with them utterly had not Juda Maccabæus flaunted his banner, and the Roman eagles pounced upon their prey. Once more the Temple was rebuilt, surperber than ever, and from the throne of David, Antipas saw the upstart that was his father rule Judæa.

With him the panorama and the kaleidoscope of its details abruptly ceased. But through it all the voices of the prophets had rung more insistently with each defeat. The covenant in the wilderness was unforgetable; in the chained links of slavery they saw the steps of a throne, the triumph of truth over error, peace over war, Israel pontiff and shepherd of the nations of the world.

The expectation of a liberator who should free the bonds of a people and definitively re-create the land of the elect possessed them utterly; his advent had been constantly awaited, obstinately proclaimed; the faith in him was unshakeable. Palestine was filled with believers praying the Eternal not to let them die

before the promise was fulfilled; the atmosphere itself was charged with expectation.

And as the visions rushed through his mind, Antipas fell to wondering whether that covenant was as meaningless as he had thought, or whether by any chance this rabbi who had been arguing at Capharnahum could be the usher of Israel's hope. If he were, then indeed he might say good-bye to his tetrarchy, to his dream of a kingdom as well.

"Yes," Pahul repeated, "the Son of God!"

Antipas had been so far away that now he started as one does whom the touch of a hand awakes. To recover himself he leaned over and plunged his face in the jar. The wine brought him courage.

He must be suppressed, he decided.

"But," the butler continued, "I——"

The frontal of the palace was set with lights. The parasols of the palms had turned from green to black, the stars seemed remoter, the sky more dark.

From beyond came the call and answer of the sentinels.

Antipas stood up. A fringe of his tunic was detained by a rivet of the bench on which he had sat; he stooped to loose it; something moist touched his fingers, and as he moved to the palace the black-faced ape sprang at his side and nibbled at the jewels on his hand.

CHAPTER V.

V.

THE house of Simon Barlevi was gray, and in shape an oblong. It had a flat roof laid with a plaster of lime, about which was a fretwork of open tiles. Beneath, for doorway, was a recess, surmounted by an arch and covered with a layer of mud. On each side was a room.

In the recess, sheltered from the sun and visited by the breeze, Simon stood. His garments were white, and where they were not they had been neatly chalked. On the border of his skirt and sleeves were the regulation fringes, and on his forehead and about his left arm the phylacteries which Pharisees affect. He was not pleasant to the eye, but he was virtuous and a strict observer of the Law.

In the room at his left were mats and painted stools, set in the manner customary when guests are awaited. For on

that day Simon Barlevi was to give a little feast, to which he had bidden his friends and also a rabbi whom he had listened to in the synagogue, and with whose ideas he did not at all agree. Save for the mats and stools, and a lamp of red clay, the room was bare.

In front of the house was a bit of ground enclosed by a hedge of stones; and now as Simon stood in the recess a guest appeared.

"Reulah!" he exclaimed, "the Lord be with you."

And Reulah answering, as etiquette required, "Unto you be peace, and to your house be peace, and unto all you have be peace," the two friends clasped hands raised them as though to kiss them, then each withdrawing kissed his own hand, and struck it on his forehead.

Singularly enough, host and guest looked much alike. Simon had the appearance of one conscious of and strong in his own rectitude, while Reulah seemed humbler and more effaced. Otherwise

there was not a pin to choose between them.

To Simon's face had come an expression of perplexity in which there was zeal.

"I was thinking, Reulah," he announced, "of the rabbi who is to break bread with us to-day. His teaching does not comfort me."

Reulah was unlatching his shoes. "Nor me," he interjected.

"On questions of purity and impurity he seems unscrupulously negligent. I have heard that he is a glutton and a wine-bibber. I have heard that he despises the washing of the hands."

"Whoso does," Reulah threw back, "will be rooted out of the world."

Simon nodded; a smile of protracted amiability hovered in the corners of his mouth. For a moment he played with his beard.

"I think," he added, "that he will find here food in plenty, and counsel as well."

Reulah closed his eyes benignly, and Simon, in a falsetto which he affected

when he desired to impress, continued in gentle menace:

"But I have certain questions to put to him. Whether water from an unclean vessel defiles that which is clean. Whether the flesh of a dead body alone defiles, or the skin and bones as well. I want to see how he will answer that. Then I may ask his opinion on points of the ritual. Should the incense be lighted before the high-priest appears or as he does so. Is or is not the Sabbath broken by the killing of the Paschal lamb? Why is it lawful to take tithe of corn and wine and oil, and not of anise, cummin, and peppers? In swearing by the Temple, should one not first swear by the gold on the Temple? and in swearing by the altar, should one or should one not first swear by the sacrifices on it? These things, since he preaches, he must know. If he does not——"

And Simon looked at his friend as who should say: What is there wanting in me?

"If I may be taught another duty I will observe it," said Reulah, sweetly.

At this evidence of meekness Simon grunted. Two other guests were approaching. On the edges of their tallîth were tassels made of four threads which had been drawn through an eyelet and doubled to make eight. Seven of these threads were of equal length, but the eighth was longer, and, twisted into five knots, represented the five books of the Law. The right hand on the left breast, they saluted their host, and placing in turn a hand under his beard, they kissed it. A buzz of inquiries followed, interrupted by the coming and embracing of newer guests, the unloosing of sandals, the washing of feet.

As they assembled, one drew Simon aside and whispered importantly. Simon's eyes dilated, astonishment lifted him, visibly, like a lash, and his hands trembled above his head.

"Have you heard," he exclaimed to the others—"have you heard that the Nazarene whom I invited here, and who pretends to be a prophet, allowed his followers to pluck corn on the Sabbath, to

thresh it even, and defended and approved their violation of the Law? Have you heard it? Is is true?"

Reulah quaked as one stricken by palsy. "On the Sabbath!" he moaned. "On the Sabbath! Why, I would not send a message on Wednesday, lest perchance it should be delivered on the Sabbath day. Surely it cannot be."

But on that point the others were certain. They were all aware of the scandal; one had been an eye-witness, another had heard the Nazarene assert that he was "Lord of the Day."

"This is monstrous!" Simon cried.

"He declared," the eye-witness continued, "that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

"It is monstrous!" Simon repeated. "The command to do no manner of work is absolute and emphatic. The killing of a flea on the Sabbath is as heinous as the butchering of a bullock. The preservation of life itself is inhibited. Moses had the son of Shelomith stoned to death for gathering sticks on it. Shammai oc-

cupied six days of the week in thinking how he could best observe it. It is unlawful to wear a false tooth on the Sabbath, and if a tooth ache it is unlawful to rinse the mouth with vinegar."

"Yet," objected Reulah, "it is lawful to hold the vinegar in the mouth provided you swallow it afterward."

No one paid any attention to him. Simon's indignation increased. Of the thirty-nine Abhôth he quoted twelve; he showed that the Nazarene had violated each one of these prohibitions against labor; he showed, too, that by his subsequent speech and bearing he had practically scoffed at the Toldôth, at the synagogue which had drawn it up as well.

"If the Sadducees were not in power, Jerusalem should hear of this. As it is——"

Whatever resolution he may have intended to express remained unuttered. A silence fell upon his lips; his guests drew back. At the step stood the Nazarene, behind him his treasurer, Judas of Kerioth.

For a second only Jesus hesitated. He stooped, undid his shoes, and moved to where Simon stood. The latter bowed constrainedly.

"Master," he said, "we awaited you."

At this his friends retreated into the little room. Reulah reached the middle seat of the central mat first and held it, his nostrils quivering at the envy of the others.

Preceded by their host, Jesus and Judas found places near together, and, the usual ablutions performed, the customary prayers recited, lay, the upper part of the body supported by the left arm, the head raised, the limbs outstretched.

On the stools were dishes of stewed lentils, milk, and cakes of mashed locusts. Reulah ate with the tips of his lips, greedily, like a goat. Judas, too, ate with an air of hunger. The Master broke bread absently, his thoughts on other things. These thoughts Simon interrupted.

"Rabbi"—and to his wide mouth came

the sneer of one propounding a riddle already solved—"it is not meet, is it, to thresh on the Sabbath day? Yet since you permit your followers to do so, how are we to distinguish between what is lawful and what is not?"

The Master raised his eyes. The dawn was in them, high noon as well.

"Show yourself a tried money-changer. Choose that which is good metal, reject that which is bad."

Simon blinked as at a sudden light.

"But," he persisted, "in seeking to observe the Law, there is not a jot or tittle in it that can be rejected."

With an acquiescence that was both vague and melancholy, Jesus looked the Pharisee in the face.

"Seek those things that are great, and little things will be added unto you——"

He would have said more, perhaps, but a woman who had entered from the recess approached circuitously, and kneeling beside him let a tear, long as a pearl, fall upon his unsandalled feet.

Judas' heart bounded; he glared at

her, his eyes dilating like a leopard preparing to spring. At once he was back in the circus, gazing into the perils and the splendors of a woman's face, telling himself with reiterated insistence that to hold her to him would be the birthday of his life; and here, within reach of his hand, was she whom in the din of the chariots he had recognized as the one woman in all the world, and who for one moment the day before had lain unconscious in his arms.

Reulah sat motionless, his mouth agape, a finger extended. "The paramour of Pandera," he stammered at last; and lowering his eyes, he looked at her covetously from beneath the lids.

Simon, too, sat motionless. There was rage in his expression, hate even—that hatred which the beautiful excites in the base. Time and again he had seen her; she was a byword with him; from the height of her residence she looked down on his mean gray walls; her luxury had been an insult to his abstinence; and with that zest which a small nature takes in

the humiliation of its superior, he determined, in spite of her manifest abjection, to humiliate her still more.

"If this man," he confided to his neighbor, "has in him anything of that which goes to the making of a prophet, he will divine what manner of woman she is. If he does not, I will denounce them both." And nourishing his hate he waited yet a while.

The Master seemed depressed. The great secret which in all the world he alone possessed may have weighed with him. But he turned to Mary and looked at her. As he looked she bent yet lower. The marvel of her hair was unconfined; it fell about her in tangling streams of gold and flame, while on his feet there fell from her tears such as no woman ever shed before. In the era of primitive hospitality the daughters of kings had not disdained to unlatch the sandals of their fathers' guests; but now, at the feet of Mercy, for the first time Repentance knelt. And still the tears continued, unstanched and unde-

tained. Grief, something keener still perhaps, had claimed her as its own. She bent lower. Then Misery looked up at Compassion.

The Master stretched his hand. For a moment it rested on her head. She quivered and clutched at her throat; and as he withdrew that hand, in which all panaceas were, from her gown she took a little box, opened it, and dropping the contents where the tears had fallen, with a sudden movement she caught her hair and poured its lava on his feet.

An aroma of beckoning oases filled the small room, passed into the recess, mounted to the roof, pervaded and penetrated it, and escaped to the sky above.

And still she wept. Judas no longer saw her tears, he heard them. They fell swiftly one after another, like the ripple of the rain. A sob broke from her, but in it was something which foretokened peace, the sob which comes to those who have conceived a despairing hope, and suddenly intercept its fulfilment. Her hands trembled; the little box fell from

her and broke. The noise it made exorcised the silence.

The Master turned to his host. "I have a word to say to you."

Simon stroked his beard and bowed.

"There was once a man who had two debtors. One owed him five hundred pence, the other fifty. Both were poor, and because of their poverty the debt of each he forgave."

For an instant Jesus paused and seemed to muse; then, with that indulgence which was to illuminate the world, "Tell me, Simon," he inquired, "which was the more grateful?"

Simon assumed an air of perplexity, and glanced cunningly from one guest to another. Presently he laughed outright.

"Why, the one who owed the most, of course."

Reulah suppressed a giggle. By the expression of the others it was patent that to them also the jest appealed. Only Judas did not seem to have heard; he sat bolt upright, fumbling Mary with his violent eyes.

The Master made a gesture of assent, and turned to where Mary crouched. She was staring at him with that look which the magnetized share with animals.

"You see her?"

Straightening himself, he leaned on his elbow and scrutinized his host.

"Simon, I am your guest. When I entered here there was no kiss to greet me, there was no oil for my head, no water for my feet. But this woman whom you despise has not ceased to embrace them. She has washed them with her tears, anointed them with nard, and dried them with her hair. Her sins, it may be, are many, but, Simon, they are forgiven——"

Simon, Reulah, the others, muttered querulously. To forgive sins was indeed an attribute which no one, save the Eternal, could arrogate to himself.

"—for she has loved much."

And turning again to Mary, who still crouched at his side, he added:

"Your sins are forgiven. Go now, and in peace."

But the fierce surprise of the Pharisees

was not to be shocked into silence. Reulah showed his teeth; they were pointed and treacherous as a jackal's. Simon loudly asserted disapproval and wonder too.

"I am amazed——" he began.

The Master checked him:

"The beginning of truth is amazement. Wonder, then, at what you see; for he that wonders shall reign, and he that reigns shall rest."

The music of his voice heightened the beauty of the speech. On Mary it fell and rested as had the touch of his hand.

"Messiah, my Lord!" she cried. "In your breast is the future, in your heart the confidence of God. Let me but tell you. There are those that live whose lives are passed; the tombs do not hold all of those that are dead. I was dead; you brought me to life. I had no conscience; you gave me one, for I was dead," she insisted. "And yet," she added, with a little moan, so human, so sincere, that it might have stirred a Cæsar, let alone a

Christ, "not wholly dead. No, no, dear Lord, not wholly dead."

Again her tears gushed forth, profuser and more abundant than before; her frail body shook with sobs, her fingers intertwined.

"Not wholly dead," she kept repeating. "No, no, not wholly dead."

Jesus touched his treasurer.

"She is not herself. Lead her away; see her to her home." And that the others might hear, and profit as well, he added, in a higher key, "Deference to a woman is always due."

And to those words, which were to found chivalry and banish the boor, Judas led Mary from the room.

CHAPTER VI.

VI.

"ARE you better?"

The road that skirted the lake had branched to the left, and there an easy ascent led to the hill beyond. On both sides were carpets of flowers and of green, and slender larches that held their arms and hid the sky. Above, an eagle circled, and on the lake a sail flapped idly.

"Yes, I am better," Mary answered.

From her eyes the perils had passed, but the splendors remained, accentuated now by vistas visible only to herself. The antimony, too, with which she darkened them had gone, and with it the alkanet she had used on her cheeks. Her dress was olive, and, contrary to custom, her head uncovered.

"You are not strong, perhaps?"

As Judas spoke, he thought of the

episode in the synagogue, and wished her again unconscious in his arms.

"I have been so weak," she murmured. And after a moment she added: "I am tired; let me sit awhile."

The carpet of flowers and of green invited, and presently Judas dropped at her side. About his waist a linen girdle had been wound many times; from it a bag of lynx-skin hung. The white garments, the ample turban that he wore, were those of ordinary life, but in his bearing was just that evanescent charm which now and then the Oriental possesses—the subtlety that subjugates and does not last.

"But you must be strong; we need your strength."

Mary turned to him wonderingly.

"Yes," he repeated, "we need your strength. Johanna has joined us, as you know. Susannah too. They do what they can; but we need others—we need you."

"Do you mean——"

Something had tapped at her heart,

something which was both joy and dread, and she hesitated, fearing that the possibility which Judas suggested was unreal, that she had not heard his words aright.

"Do you mean that he would let me?"

"He would love you for it. But then he loves everyone, yet best, I think, his enemies."

"They need it most," Mary answered; but her thoughts had wandered.

"And I," Judas added—"I loved you long ago."

Then he too hesitated, as though uncertain what next to say, and glanced at her covertly. She was looking across the lake, over the country of the Gadarenes, beyond even that, perhaps, into some infinite veiled to him.

"I remember," he continued, tentatively, "it was there at Tiberias I saw you first. You were entering the palace. I waited. The sentries ordered me off; one threw a stone. I went to where the garden is; I thought you might be among the flowers. The wall was so high I could not see. The guards drove me

away. I ran up the hill through the white and red terraces of the grape. From there I could see the gardens, the elephants with their ears painted, and the oxen with the twisted horns. The wind sung about me like a flute; the sky was a tent of different hues. Something within me had sprung into life. It was love, I knew. It had come before, yes, often, but never as then. For," he added, and the gleam of his eyes was as a fanfare to the thought he was about to express, "love returns to the heart as the leaf returns to the tree."

Mary looked at him vacantly. "What was he saying?" she wondered. From a sea of grief she seemed to be passing onto an archipelago of dream.

"The next day I loitered in the neighborhood of the palace. You did not appear. Toward evening I questioned a gardener. He said your name was Mary, but he would tell me nothing else. On the morrow was the circus. I made sure you would be there—with the tetrarch, I thought; and, that I might be near the

tribune, before the sun had set I was at the circus gate. There were others that came and waited, but I was first. I remember that night as never any since. I lay outstretched, and watched the moon; your face was in it: it was a dream, of course. Yes, the night passed quickly, but the morning lagged. When the gate was open, I sprang like a zemer from tier to tier until I reached the tribune. There, close by, I sat and waited. At last you came, and with you new perfumes and poisons. Did you feel my eyes? they must have burned into you. But no, you gave no heed to me. They told me afterward that Scarlet won three times. I did not know. I saw but you. Once merely an abyss in which lightning was.

"Before the last race was done I got down and tried to be near the exit through which I knew you must pass. The guards would not let me. The next day I made friends with a sentry. He told me that you were Mirjam of Magdala;

that Tiberius wished you at Rome, and that you had gone with Antipas to his citadel. In the wine-shops that night men slunk from me afraid. A week followed of which I knew nothing, then chance disentangled its threads. I found myself in a crowd at the base of a hill; a prophet was preaching. I had heard prophets before; they were as torches in the night: he was the Day. I listened and forgot you. He called me; I followed. Until Sunday I had not thought of you again. But when you appeared in the synagogue I started; and when you fainted, when I held you in my arms and your eyes opened as flowers do, I looked into them and it all returned. Mary, kiss me and kill me, but kiss me first."

"Yes, he is the Day."

Of the entire speech she had heard but that. It had entered perhaps into thoughts of her own with which it was in unison, and she repeated the phrase mechanically, as a child might do. But now as he ceased to speak, perplexed,

annoyed too at the inappositeness of her reply, she came back from the infinite in which she had roamed, and for a moment both were silent.

At the turning of the road a man appeared. At the sight of Judas he halted, then called him excitedly by name.

"It is Mathias," Judas muttered, and got to his feet. The man hurried to them. He was broad of shoulder and of girth, the jaw lank and earnest. His eyes were small, and the lids twitched nervously. He was out of breath, and his garments were dust-covered.

"Where is the Master?" he asked; and at once, without waiting a reply, he added: "I have just seen Johanna. Her husband told her that the tetrarch is seeking him; he thinks him John, and would do him harm. We must go from here."

Judas assented. "Yes, we must all go. Mary, it may be a penance, but it is his will."

Mathias gazed inquiringly at them both.

"It is his will," Judas repeated, authoritatively.

Mary turned away and caught her forehead in her hands. "If this is a penance," she murmured, "what then are his rewards?"

CHAPTER VII.

VII

On the floor of a little room Mary lay, her face to the ground. In her ears was the hideousness of a threat that had fastened on her abruptly like a cheetah in the dark. From below came the sound of banqueting. Beyond was the Bitter Sea, the stars dancing in its ripples; and there in the shadow of the evergreens was the hut in which that Sephôrah lived to whom long ago Martha had forbidden her to speak. Through the lattice came the scent of olive-trees, and with it the irresistible breath of spring.

In its caress the threat which had made her its own presently was lifted, and mingling with other things fused into them. The kaleidoscope of time and events which visits those that drown

possessed her, and for a second Mary relived a year.

There had been the sudden flight from Magdala, the first days with the Master, the gorges of the Jordan, the journey to the coast, the glittering green scales of that hydra the sea. Then the loiterings on the banks of the sacred Leontes, the journey back to Galilee, the momentary halt at Magdala, the sail past Bethsaïda, Capharnahum, Chorazin, the fording of the river, the trip to Cæsarea Philippi, the snow and gold of Hermon, the visit to Gennesareth, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and the return to Bethany.

Her recollections intercrossed, scenes that were trivial ousted others that were grave; the purple limpets of Sidon, the shrine of Ashtaroth, the invective at Bethsaïda, the transfiguration on the mountain height, the cure of lepers, and the presence that coerced. Yet through them all certain things remained immutable, and of these, primarily her contact with the Christ.

To her, Jesus was not the Son of man

alone, he was the light of this world, the usher of the next. When he spoke, there came to her a sense of frightened joy so acute that the hypostatical union which left even the disciples perplexed was by her realized and understood. She had the faith of a little child. And on the hills and through the intervales over which they journeyed, in the glare of the eager sun or beneath the wattled boughs, the emanations of the Divine filled her with transports so contagious that they affected even Thomas, who was skeptical by birth; and when, after the descent from Hermon, two or three of the disciples mused together over the spectacle which they had seen, the rhyme of her lips parted ineffably. She too had seen him aureoled with the sun, dazzling as the snow-fields on the heights. To her it was ever in that aspect he appeared, with a radiance so intense even that there had been moments in which she had veiled her eyes as from a light that only eagles could support. To her, marvels were as natural as the escape of night.

At Beth-Seân she had heard him speak to dumb beasts, and never doubted but that they answered him. At Dan she had seen a short-eared hare rush to him for refuge, and follow him afterwards as a dog might do. At Kinnereth he had called to a lark that from a tree-top was pouring its heart out to the morning, and the lark had fluttered down and nestled in his hand. At Gadara he had tamed wild doves, and a swarm of bees had stopped and glistened in his hair. At Cæsarea, when he began to speak, the thrushes that had been singing ceased; and when the parables were delivered, began anew, louder, more jubilant than before, and continued to sing until he blessed them, when they mounted in one long ascending line straight to the zenith above. At his approach the little gold-bellied fish of the Leontes had leaped from the stream. In the suburbs of Sidon the jackals had fawned at his feet. The underbrush had parted to let him pass, and where he passed white roses came and the tenderness of anemones.

At times he seemed to her immaterial as a shadow in a dream, at others appalling as the desert; and once when, in prayer, she entered with him into the intimacy of the infinite, she caught the shiver of an invisible harp whose notes seemed to fall from the night. And as she journeyed, her love expanded with the horizon. She loved with a love no woman's heart has transcended. In its prodigality and ascending gammes there was place for nothing save the Ideal.

The little band meanwhile lived as strangers on earth. Out of her abundant means their simple wants were supplied. She was less a burden than a sustenance; her faith bridged many a doubtful hour; and when, as often occurred, they disputed among themselves concerning their future rank and precedence, Mary dreamed of a paradise more pure.

One evening, near the rushes of Lake Phiala, where the Jordan leaps anew to the light, a Greek merchant who had refused them shelter at Seleucia ambled that way on an ass, and would have

stopped, perhaps, but one of the band scoffed him, and he rode on, and disappeared in the haze of the hills.

Unobserved, the Master had seen and heard; presently he called them to where he stood.

"Do not think," he admonished—"do not think that because you imitate the Pharisees you are perfecting your lives. They fast, they pray, they weep, and they mortify the flesh; but to them one thing is impossible, charity to the failings of others. Whoso then shall come to you, be he friend or foe, penitent or thief, receive him kindly. Aid the helpless, console the unfortunate, forgive your enemy, and forget yourselves—that is charity. Without it the kingdom of heaven is lost to you. There, there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female; nor can it come to you until the garment of shame is trampled under foot, until two are as one, and the body which is without is as the soul within."

Thereat, with a gesture of exquisite in-

dulgence, he turned and left them to the stars.

Mary had heard, and in the palingenesis disclosed she saw space wrapped in a luminous atmosphere, such as she fancied lay behind the sun. There, instead of the thrones and diadems of the elect, was an immutable realm in which there was neither death nor life, clear ether merely, charged with beatitudes. And so, when the disciples disputed among themselves, Mary dreamed of diaphanous hours and immaculate days that knew no night, and in this wise lived until from the terrace of Jerusalem's Temple the Master bade her return to Bethany and wait him there.

Obedience to that command was bitter to her. She did not murmur, however. "Rabboni," she cried, "let me but do your will on earth, and afterwards save me or destroy me as your pleasure is."

With that she had gone to her sister's house, and to the bewildered Martha poured out her heart anew. There could be no question of forgiveness now, of

penitence even; her sins, such as they were, had been remitted by one to whom pardon was an attribute. And this doubtless Martha understood, for she took her in her arms unreproachfully and mingled her tears with hers.

Where all is marvel the marvellous disappears. To the accounts which Mary gave of her journeys with the little band that followed the Master, Martha listened with an attention which nothing could distract. With her she sailed on the lovely lake; with her she visited cities smothering in the scent of cassia and of sugar-cane; with her she passed through glens where panthers prowled, and bandits crueller than they. With her eyes she saw the listening multitudes, with her ears she heard again the words of divine forgiveness; and, the lulab and the citron in her hands, she assisted at the Feast of the Tabernacles, and watched the vain attempt to charm the recalcitrant Temple and captivate the inimical town.

For in Jerusalem, in place of the re-

assuring confidence of peasants, was the irritable incredulity of priests; instead of meadows, courts. Besides, was not this prophet from Galilee, and what good had ever come from there? Then, too, he was not an authorized teacher. He belonged to no school. The followers of Hillel, the disciples of Shammai, did not recognize him. He was merely a factious Nazarene trained in the shop of a carpenter; one who, by repeating that it was easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, flattered basely the mob of mendicants that surrounded him. The rabble admired, but the clergy stood aloof. When he was not ignored he was disdained. Save the pleb, no one listened.

Presently he spoke louder. Into the grave music of the Syro-Chaldaic tongue he put the mutterings of thunder. Where he had preached, he upbraided; in place of exquisite parables came sonorous threats. He blessed but rarely, sometimes he cursed. That mosaic, the Law,

he treated like a cobweb; and to the arrogant clergy a rumor filtered that this vagabond, who had not where to lay his head, declared his ability to destroy the Temple, and to rebuild it, in three days, anew.

A rumor such as that was incredible. Inquiries were made. The rumor was substantiated. It was learned that he healed the sick, cured the blind; that he was in league, perhaps, with the Pharisees.

The Sanhedrim took counsel. They were Sadducees every one. The Pharisees were their hereditary foes. Both were militant, directing men and things as best they could. The Sadducees held strictly to the letter of the Law; the Pharisees held to the Law, and to tradition as well. But the Sadducees were in power, the Pharisees were not. The former endeavored in every way to maintain their authority over the people; and against that authority, against the aristocracy, the priesthood, and the accomplices of foreign dominion, the Pharisees ceaselessly excited

the mob. In their inability to overthrow the pontificate, they undermined it. With microscopic attention they examined and criticised every act of the clergy; and, with a view of showing the incompetence of the priests, they affected rigid theories in regard to ritualistic points. Every detail of the ceremonial office was watched by them with eyes that were never pleased. They asserted that the rolls of the Law from which the priests read the Pentateuch were made of impure matter, and, having handled them, the priests had become impure as well. The manner in which the incense was made and offered, the minutiæ governing the sacrifices, the legality of hierarchal decisions—on each and every possible subject they exerted themselves to show the unworthiness of the officiants, insinuating even that the names of the fathers of many of the priests were not inscribed at Zipporim in the archives of Jeshana. As a consequence, many of those whose rights the Pharisees affected to uphold saw in the hierarchy little more than a body of men

unworthy to approach the altar, a group of Herodians who in religion lacked every requisite for the service of God, and who in public and in private were bankrupts in patriotism, morality, and shame.

The possibility, therefore, that this fractious demagogue had found favor with the Pharisees was grave. He was becoming a force. He threatened many a prerogative. Moreover, Jerusalem had had enough of agitators. People were drawn by their promises into the solitudes, and there incited to revolt. Rome did not look upon these things leniently. If they continued, Tiberius was quite capable of putting Judæa in a yoke which it would not be easy to carry. Clearly the Nazarene was seditious, and as such to be abolished. The difficulty was to abolish him and yet conciliate the mob.

It was then that the Sanhedrim took counsel. As a result, and with the hope of entrapping him into some blasphemous utterance on which a charge would lie, they sent meek-eyed Scribes to question him concerning the authority that he

claimed. He routed the meek-eyed Scribes. Then, fancying that he might be seduced into some expression which could be construed as treason, they sent young and earnest men to learn from him their duty to Rome. The young and earnest men returned crestfallen and abashed.

The elders, nonplussed, debated. A levite suspected that the casuistry and marvellous cures of the Nazarene must be due to a knowledge of the incommunicable name, Shemhammephorash, seared on stone in the thunders of Sinai, and which to utter was to summon life or beckon death. Another had heard that while in Galilee he was believed to be in league with Baal-Zebub, Lord of Flies.

To this gossip no attention was paid. Annas, merely — the old high-priest, father-in-law of Caiaphas, who officiated in his stead—laughed to himself. There was no such stone, there was no such god. Another idea had been welcomed. A festival was in progress; there was gayety in the neighborhood, drinking too; and

as over a million of pilgrims were herded together, now and then an offence occurred. The previous night, for instance, a woman had been arrested for illicit commerce.

Annas tapped on his chin. He had the pompous air of a chameleon, the same long, thin lips, the large, protruding eyes.

"Take her before the Galilean," he said. "He claims to be a rabbi; he must know the Law. If he acquit her, it is heresy, and for that a charge will lie. Does he condemn her he is at our mercy, for he will have alienated the mob."

A smile of perfect understanding passed like a vagrant breeze across the faces of the elders, and the levites were ordered to lead the prisoner to the Christ.

They found him in the Woman's Court. From a lateral chamber a priest, unfit for other than menial services because of a carbuncle on his lip, dropped the wood he was sorting for the altar and gazed curiously at the advancing throng, in which the prisoner was.

She must have been very fair, but now

her features were distorted with anguish, veiled with shame. The blue robe she wore was torn, and a sleeve rent to the shoulder disclosed a bare white arm. She was a wife, a mother too. Her name was Ahulah; her husband was a shoemaker. At the Gannath Gate, where her home was, were two little children. She worshipped them, and her husband she adored. Some hallucination, a tremor of the flesh, the flush of wine, and there, circled by a leering crowd, she crouched, her life disgraced, irrecoverable for evermore.

The charge was made, the usual question propounded. The Master had glanced at her but once. He seemed to be looking afar, beyond the Temple and its terraces, beyond the horizon itself. But the accusers were impatient. He bent forward and with a finger wrote on the ground. The letters were illegible, perhaps, yet the symbol of obliteration was in that dust which the morrow would disperse. Again he wrote, but the charge was repeated, louder, more impatiently than before.

Jesus straightened himself. With the weary indulgence of one to whom hearts are as books, he looked about him, then to the dome above.

"Whoever is without sin among you," he declared, "may cast the first stone."

When he looked again the crowd had slunk away. Only Ahulah remained, her head bowed on her bare white arm. From the lateral chamber the priest still peered, the carbuncle glistening on his lip.

"Did none condemn you?" the Master asked.

And as she sobbed merely, he added: "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more."

To the elders this was very discomforting. They had failed to unmask him as a traitor to God, to Rome even, or yet as a demagogue defying the Law. They did not care to question again. He had worsted them three times. Nor could they without due cause arrest him, for there were the Pharisees. Besides, a religious trial was full of risk, and the

coöperation of the procurator not readily to be relied on. It was that coöperation they needed most, for with it such feeling as might be aroused would fall on Rome and not on them. As for Pilate, he could put a sword in front of what he said.

In their enforced inaction they got behind that wall of prejudice where they and their kin feel most secure, and there waited, prepared at the first opportunity to invoke the laws of their ancestors, laws so cumbersome and complex that the Romans, accustomed to the clearest pandects, had laughed and left them, erasing only the right to kill.

At last chance smiled. Into Jerusalem a rumor filtered that the Nazarene they hated so had raised the dead, that the suburbs hailed him as the Messiah, and that he proclaimed himself the Son of God. At once the Sanhedrim reassembled. A political deliverer they might have welcomed, but in a Messiah they had little faith. The very fact of his Messiahship constituted him a claimant to the Jewish throne, and as such a pre-

tender with whom Pilate could deal. Moreover—and here was the point—to claim divinity was to attack the unity of God. Of impious blasphemy there was no higher form.

It were better, Annas suggested, that a man should die than that a nation should perish—a truism, surely, not to be gainsaid.

That night it was decided that Jesus and Judaism could not live together; a price was placed upon his head, and to the blare of four hundred trumpets excommunication was pronounced.

Of all of these incidents save the last Mary had been necessarily aware. In company with Johanna, the wife of Herod's steward, Mary, wife of Clopas, and Salomè, mother of Zebedee's children, she had heard him reiterate the burning words of Jeremiah, and seen him purge the Temple of its traffickers; she had heard, too, the esoteric proclamation, "Before Abraham was, I am;" and she had seen him lash the Sadducees with invective. She had been present when a

letter was brought from Abgar Uchomo, King of Edessa, to Jesus, "the good Redeemer," in which the potentate prayed the prophet to come and heal him of a sickness which he had, offering him a refuge from the Jews, and quaintly setting forth the writer's belief that Jesus was God or else His Son. She had been present, also, when the charge was made against Ahulah, and had comforted that unfortunate in womanly ways. "Surely," she had said, "if the Master who does not love you can forgive, how much more readily must your husband who does!" Whereupon Ahulah had become her slave, tending her thereafter with almost bestial devotion.

These episodes, one after another, she related to Martha; to Eleazer, her brother; to Simon, Martha's husband; to anyone that chanced that way. For it was then that the Master had bade her go to Bethany. For a little space he too had forsaken Jerusalem. Now and then with some of his followers he would venture in the neighborhood, yet only to

be off again through the scorched hollows of the Ghôr before the sun was up.

These things it was that paraded before her as she lay on the floor of the little room, felled by the hideousness of a threat that had sprung upon her, abruptly, like a cheetah in the dark. To Martha and to the others on one subject alone had she been silent, and now at the moment it dominated all else.

From the day on which she joined the little band to whom the future was to give half of this world and all of the next, Judas had been ever at her ear. As a door that opens and shuts at the will of a hand, his presence and absence had barred the vistas or left them clear. At first he had affected her as a scarabæus affects the rose. She knew of him, and that was all. When he spoke, she thought of other things. And as the blind remain unawakened by the day, he never saw that where the wanton had been the saint had come. To him she was a book of ivory bound in gold, whose contents he longed to possess; she was a

book, but one from which whole chapters had been torn, the preface destroyed; and when his increasing insistence forced itself upon her, demanding, obviously, countenance or rebuke, she walked serenely on her way, disdaining either, occupied with higher things. It was of the Master only that she appeared to think. When he spoke, it was to her as though God really lived on earth; her eyes lighted ineffably, and visibly all else was instantly forgot. At that time her life was a dream into whose charmed precincts a bat had flown.

These things, gradually, Judas must have understood. In Mary's eyes he may have caught the intimation that to her now only the ideal was real; or the idea may have visited him that in the infinite of her faith he disappeared and ceased to be. In any event he must have taken counsel with himself, for one day he approached her with a newer theme.

"I have knocked on the tombs; they are dumb."

Mary, with that grace with which a

woman gathers a flower when thinking of him whom she loves, bent a little and turned away.

"Have you heard of the Buddha?" he asked. "Babylon is peopled with his disciples. One of them met Jesus in the desert, and taught him his belief. It is that he preaches now, only the Buddha did not know of a heaven, for there is none."

And he added, after a pause: "I tell you I have knocked on the tombs; there is no answer there."

With that, as a panther falls asleep, his claw blood-red, Judas nodded and left her to her thoughts.

"In Eternity there is room for everything," she said, when he came to her again.

"Eternity is an abyss which the tomb uses for a sewer," he answered. "Its flood is corruption. The day only exists, but in it is that freedom which waves possess. Mary, if you would but taste it with me! Oh, to mix with you as light with day, as stream with sea, I would

suck the flame that flickers on the walls of sepulchres."

She shuddered, and he saw it.

"You have taught me to love," he hissed; "do not teach me now to hate."

Mary mastered her revolt. "Judas, the day will come when you will cease to speak as you do."

"You believe, then, still?"

"Yes, surely; and so do you."

"The day will come," he muttered, "when you will cease to believe."

"And you too," she answered. "For then you will *know*."

The dialogue with its variations continued, at intervals, for months. There were times, weeks even, when he avoided all speech with her. Then, abruptly, when she expected it least, he would return more volcanic than before. These attacks she accustomed herself to regard as necessary, perhaps, to the training of patience, of charity too, and so bore with them, until at last Jerusalem was reached. Meanwhile she held to her trust as to a fringe of the mantle of Christ. To her

the past was a grammar, its name—To-morrow. And in the service of the Master, in the future which he had evoked, she journeyed and dreamed.

But in Jerusalem Judas grew acrider. He had fits of unnecessary laughter, and spells of the deepest melancholy. He quarrelled with anyone who would let him, and then for the irritation he had displayed he would make amends that were wholly slavish. His companions distrusted him. He had been seen talking amicably with the corrupt levites, the police of the Temple, and once he had been detected in a wine-shop of low repute. The Master, apparently, noticed nothing of this; nor did Mary, whose thoughts were on other things.

At Bethany one evening Judas came to her. The sun, sinking through clouds, placed in the west the tableau of a duel to the death between a titan and a god. There was the glitter of gigantic swords, and the red of immortal blood.

"Mary," he began, and as he spoke there was a new note in his voice—"Mary,

I have watched and waited, and to those that watch how many lamps burn out! One after another those that I tended went. There was a flicker, a little smoke, and they had gone. I tried to relight them, but perhaps the oil was spent; perhaps, too, I was like the blind that hold a torch. My way has not been clear. The faith I had, and which, I do not know, but which, it may be, would have been strengthened, evaporated when you came. The rays of the sun I had revered became as the threads of shadows, interconnecting life and death. In them I could see but you. In the jaw of night, in the teeth of day, always I have seen you. Mary, love is a net which woman throws. In casting yours—there! unintentionally, I know—you caught my soul. It is yours now wholly until time shall cease to be. Will you take it, Mary, or will you put it aside, a thing forever dead?"

Mary made no answer. It may be she had not heard. In the west both titan and god had disappeared. Above, in a field

of stars, the moon hung, a scythe of gold. The air was still, the hush of locusts accentuating the silence and bidding it be at rest. In a house near by there were lights shining. A woman looked out and called into the night.

Then, as though moved by some jealousy of the impalpable, Judas leaned forward and peered into her face.

"It is the Master who keeps you from me, is it not?"

"It is my belief," she answered, simply.

"It was he that gave it to you. Mary, do you know that there is a price upon his head? Do you know that if I cannot slake my love, at least I can gorge my hate? Do you know that, Mary? Do you know it? Now choose between your belief and me; if you prefer the former, the Sanhedrim will have him to-morrow. There, your sister is calling; go—and choose."

It was with the hideousness of this threat in her ears that Mary escaped to the little room where her childhood had

been passed and flung herself on the floor. From beyond came the sound of banqueting. Martha was entertaining the Lord, his disciples as well; and Mary knew that her aid was needed. But the threat pinioned and held her down. To accede was death, not of the body alone, but of the soul as well. There was no clear pool in which she might cleanse the stain; there could be no forgiveness, no obliteration, nothing in fact save the loss never to be recovered of life in the diaphanous hours and immaculate days of which she had dreamed so long.

For a little space she tried to comfort herself. Perhaps Judas was not in earnest; perhaps even he had lied. And if he had not, was there not time in plenty? The desert was neighborly. She could follow the Master there, and minister to him till the sky opened and the kingdom was prepared. And the threat, coupled with that perspective, charmed, and for the moment had for her that enticement which the quarrels and kisses of children equally possess. She would

warn him secretly, she decided, for surely as yet he did not know; she would warn him, and before the sun was up he could be beyond the Sanhedrim's reach, and she preparing to follow. For a moment she lost herself in anticipation; then, the threat loosening its hold, she stood up, her face very white in the starlight, her eyes brave and alert. Already her plan was formed; and, taking a vase that she had brought with her from Magdala, she hurried to the room below.

The Master; the disciples; Eleazer, her brother; Simon, her sister's husband, were all at meat. Martha was serving, and as Mary entered Judas stood up. She moved to where the Master was, and on him poured the contents of the vase. Thomas sniffed delightedly, for now the room was full of fragrance. The Master turned to her and smiled; the homage evidently was grateful. Mary bent nearer. Thomas and Bartholomew joined in loud praises of the aroma of the nard, and under cover of their voices she whispered,

"Rabboni, the Sanhedrim has placed a price on——"

The whisper was drowned and interrupted. Judas had shoved her away. "To what end is this waste?" he asked; and as Mary looked in his face she saw by the expression in it that her purpose had been divined and her warning overheard.

"It is absurd," he continued, with affected anger. "Ointment such as that has a value. It might better have been saved for the poor."

Thomas chimed in approvingly; placed in that light it was indeed an extravagance, unnecessary too, and he looked about to his comrades for support. Eleazer and Peter seemed inclined to view the matter differently. A discussion would have arisen, but the Master checked it gently, as was his wont.

"The poor are always with you, but me you cannot always have."

As he spoke he turned to Judas with that indulgence which was to be a heritage.

Could he *know?* Judas wondered.

Had he heard what Mary said? And, the Master's speech continuing, he glanced at her and left the room.

The moon had mowed the stars, but the sky was visibly blue. Behind the shoulder of Olivet he divined the silence of Jerusalem, the welcome of the Sadducees, the joy of hate assuaged. There was but one thing now that might deter; and as his thoughts groped through that possibility, Mary stood at his side.

"Judas——"

He wheeled, and, catching her by the wrists, stared into her eyes.

"Is it yes?"

A shudder seized her. There was dread in it, anguish too, and both were mortal. He had not lied, she saw, and the threat was real.

"Is it yes?" he repeated.

There may be moments that prolong, but there are others in which time no longer is; and as Mary shrank in the blight of Judas' stare, both felt that the culmination of life was reached.

"No!"

The monosyllable dropped from her lips like a stone, yet even as it fell the banner of Maccabæus unfurled and flaunted in her face; the voice of Esther murmured, and a vision of Judith saving a nation visited her, and, continuing, made spots on the night.

Judas had flung her from him. She reeled; the violence roused her. Who was she to consider herself when the security of the Master was at stake? How should it matter though she died, if *he* were safe?

"It is my soul you ask," she cried. "Take it. If I had a thousand souls, I would give each one for Him."

But she cried to the unanswering night. Where the road curved about the shoulder of the Mount of Olives, for one second she saw a white robe glisten. Agonized, she called again, but there was no one now to hear.

A little later, when the followers of the Lord issued from the house, Mary lay before the door, her eyes closed, her head in the dust. They touched her. She had fainted.

CHAPTER VIII.

VIII.

"THEY have him, they are taking him to Pilate."

It was Eleazer calling to his sister from the turn of the road. In a moment he was at her side, dust-covered, his sandals torn, his pathetic eyes dilated. He was breathless too, and, in default of words, with a gesture that swept the Mount of Olives, he pointed to where the holy city lay.

To Mary the morrow succeeding her swoon was a pall. Love, it may be, is a forgetfulness of all things else, but despair is very actual. It takes a hold on memory, inhabits it, and makes it its own. And during the day that followed, Mary lay preyed upon by the acutest agony that ever tortured woman yet. Early in the night, before her senses returned, the Master had gone without mentioning

whither. His destination may have been Ephraïm, Jericho even, or further yet, beyond the hollows of the Ghôr. Then,again, he might have loitered in the neighborhood, on the hill perhaps, in that open-air solitude he loved so well, and for which so often he forsook the narrowness of roofs and towns. But yet, in view of the Passover, he might have gone to Jerusalem, and it was that idea that tortured most.

It was there the keen police, the levites, were, and their masters the Sadducees, who had placed a price on his head. Did he get within the walls, then surely he was lost. At the possibilities which that idea evoked her thoughts sank like the roots of a tree and grappled with the under-earth. To her despair, regret brought its burden. A moment of self-forgetfulness, and, however horrible that forgetfulness might have been, in it danger to him whom she revered would have been averted, and, for the time being at least, dispersed utterly as last year's leaves. It had been cowardice on her part to let

Judas go ; she should have been strong when strength was needed. There were glaives to be had; the head of Holofernes could have greeted his. The legend of Judith still echoed its reproach, and recurring, pointed a slender finger of disdain.

To the heart that is sinking, hope throws a straw. Immaterial and caressing as a shadow, came to her the fancy that if the Master were in the neighborhood, at any moment he might appear. In that event it was needful that she should be prepared to aid him at once beyond the confines of Judæa. Were he already beyond them, presently she must learn it, and then could warn him of the danger of return. But meanwhile, for security's sake, had he gone by any chance to Jerusalem, some one must be there to warn him of the plot. She thought of her sister, and dismissed her. Martha was too feather-headed for an errand such as that. She thought of Ahulah,but some of those well-intentioned friends that everyone possesses had told of the misadventure

to her husband, and the latter, cruel as a woman, had spat upon her, and now through the suburbs she wandered, distraught, incompetent to aid. Her brother occurred to her. It was on him she could rely. His devotion was surpassed only by her own. Thereupon she sought him out, instructed him in his duty, and sent him forth to watch and warn.

The green afternoon faded in the hemorrhages of the setting sun. Twilight approached like a wolf. Night unfurled her great black fan; the moon came, fumbling the shadows, checkering the underbrush with silver spots. Once a caravan passed, and once from the hillside came the bark of a dog, caught up and repeated in some farm beyond; otherwise the night was unstirred; and as Mary stared into the immensities where lightning wearies and subsides, a lethargy beset her, her body was imprisoned; but her soul was free, and in a moment it mounted sheerly to a fringe of the heavens and bathed in space.

When it descended, another day had

come, and Eleazer was calling to her from the turn of the road. At once she was on earth and on her feet, and as the brother gasped for breath the sister's strength returned. There must be no more weakness now, she knew; it was time to act. She got drink, water for the feet; then Eleazer, refreshed, continued:

"I ran through the ridge and up to where the two cedars are. I looked among the cypresses beyond, in the pines where the descent begins, through the olive groves below and the booths and tents beneath. There was no trace of him anywhere. I crossed the brook and sat awhile at the Shushan gate, watching those that entered. The crowd became so dense that it was impossible to distinguish. I thought I might hear of him in the Temple. The porch was thronged. I roamed through the Mountain of the House into the Woman's Court, and out of it on the Chel. But they were all so filled with pilgrims that had he been there only accident could have brought me to him. It was on that I counted, and

I went out on Zion and Acra, where the crowd was less. It was getting late. Beth-horon was dim. I could see lights in Herod's palace. Some one said that the tetrarch of Galilee was there, the guest of the procurator. I went back by way of Antonia to Birket Israil and the Red Heifer Bridge. I had given up; it seemed to me useless to make further attempt. Suddenly I saw Judas in the angle of the porch. With him was a levite. I got behind a pillar, near where they stood, and listened. The only thing I distinctly heard was the name of Joseph of Haramathaïm. I fancied, though I was not certain, that Judas spoke as though he had just left his house. They must have moved away then, for when I looked they had gone. I knew that Joseph was a friend of the Master's, and it struck me that he might be at his house. It is in the sook of the Perfumers, back of Ophel. I ran there as fast as I could. It was unlighted. I beat on the door: there was no answer. I felt that I had been mistaken, anyway that I could do no more.

I went down again into the valley, crossed the Kedron, and would have returned here at once perhaps, but I was tired, and so, on the slope where the olive-presses are, I lay down and must have fallen asleep, for I remembered nothing till there came a tramping of men. I crouched in the underbrush. They passed very close; some had torches, some had spears. Judas was leading, and as an ape munches a flower he was muttering the Master's name."

Eleazer paused and looked at his sister. She was standing erect, her face wan, the brow contracted, the rhymes of her lips tight-pressed. Then, with a glance at Olivet, he continued:

"For a little space I waited. They had ascended the slope and halted. There was a shout, the waving of torches, then a silence. In it I heard the Master's voice, followed by a cry of pain. I hurried to where they were. They had him bound when I got there. I saw a soldier raising a hand to his ear and looking at the palm; it was red. Peter was running

one way, Thomas another. I got nearer. Some one, a levite I think, caught me by the coat. I freed myself from it and escaped up the hill.

"From there I looked down. They were going away. When they had gone, I went back and found my cloak. While I was putting it on, John appeared. 'They are taking him to Caiaphas,' he said; 'I shall follow. Come with me if you wish.' I went with him. On the way we met Peter; he joined us. We walked single-file, John leading. Beyond I could see the lights of the torches, the glint of steel. No one spoke. Peter whimpered a little. We crossed the Kedron and got up into the city. The soldiers went directly to where Annas lives; they entered in a body, and the door closed. John rapped: it was opened. He said something to the doorkeeper, who admitted him. The door closed again. Peter and I waited a little, not knowing where to turn. Presently the door reopened, and John motioned us to come in. In the court was a fire; about it were servants and

khazzans. I stopped a moment to warm my hands; Peter did the same. John had disappeared. I heard one of the khazzans say that they had taken the Master to Annas, and the others discuss what he would probably do. While I stood there listening, and wondering what had become of John, I saw the Master being led across the court to the Lishcath ha-Gazith. I left Peter, and followed. In the hall were the elders, ranged in a semicircle about Caiaphas. They must have been prepared beforehand, for the clerks of acquittal and of condemnation were there, the crier too, and a group of levites and Scribes. In a corner were some of Annas' servants. I got among them and stood unnoticed.

"The Master's hands were bound. On either side of him was a soldier. Caiaphas was livid. He looked him from head to foot.

"'You are accused,' he said, 'of inciting sedition, of defying the Law, of blasphemy, and of breaking the Sabbath day. What have you to answer?'

"The Master made no reply.

"Caiaphas pointed to the levites. 'Here,' he continued, 'are witnesses.'

"He motioned; one of them stepped forward and spoke.

"'I testify that this man has incited to sedition by denouncing the members of this reverend council as hypocrites, wolves in sheep's clothing, blind leaders of the blind; and I further testify that he has declared no one should follow them.'

"'What have you to say to that?' Caiaphas snarled. But the Master said nothing.

"The first levite moved back, and at a gesture from the high-priest another stepped forward.

"'I testify that I have seen that man eat, in defiance of the Law, with unwashed hands, and consort with publicans and people of low repute.'

"'And what have you to say to that?' Caiaphas asked again. But still the Master said nothing.

"The second levite moved back, and a third advanced.

"'I testify that I have heard that man blaspheme in calling God his father, and in declaring himself to be one with Him.'

"'Is that blasphemy or is it not?' Caiaphas bawled. But the Master's lips never moved.

"The third levite gave way to a fourth.

"'I testify that that man has broken the Sabbath in healing the sick on that day, and further that he has seduced others to break it. On the Sabbath I have heard him order a cripple to take up his bed and carry it to his home. I have heard him also declare that he could destroy the Temple and rebuild it, in three days, anew.'

"Caiaphas turned to the Master. 'Do you still refuse to answer?' he asked. 'Do you think that silence can save you? Have you heard these witnesses?'

"And as the Master still made no reply, Caiaphas lifted his hand and cried, 'I adjure you by the Eternal to answer, Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?'

"In the breathless silence Jesus raised his eyes. He looked at the high-priest,

at the levites, the Scribes. 'You have said it,' he murmured, and smiled with that air he has.

"Caiaphas grew purple. He caught his gown at the throat and ripped it from neck to hem. The elders started. I heard them mutter, '*Ish maveth.*' The high-priest glanced toward them. 'You have heard this ragged blasphemy?' he exclaimed; and, turning to where the Scribes stood, 'What,' he asked, 'does the Law decree concerning the Sabbath-breaker?'

"One of them, the book unrolled in his hand, advanced and read:

"'Ye shall keep the Sabbath holy. Whoso does any work thereon shall be cut off from his people.'

"'And what of blasphemy?'

"The Scribe glanced at the roll and repeated from memory: 'He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord shall be put to death. The congregation shall stone him, as well the stranger as he that was born in the land.'

"Caiaphas closed the fingers on the palm of his left hand, and, raising it,

turned again to the elders. '*Ish maveth*,' they repeated, closing their fingers as he had done.

"I knew then that he was condemned. After all"—and Eleazer looked wearily to the ground—"it was legal enough. Each moment I expected him to give some sign, but, save to affirm the charge of blasphemy, during the entire time he kept silent. Yes, it was legal enough. From where I stood I heard the Scribes say that he would be sentenced at sunrise, and then Pilate would have a word with him. I could do nothing. Caiaphas still fumed. I went out in the court again. In the corridor was Judas. Peter was wrangling with the servants. I did not wait for more. I got away and into the valley and up again on the hill. A cock was crowing, and I saw the dawn. O Mary, the pity of it!"

He looked at his sister. There was no weakness now in her face, nor beauty either. Age must have passed her in the night.

"And I will have a word with Pilate too," she said.

As a somnambulist might, she drew her mantle closer, and, moving to the wayside, ascended the hill. The silver and green of the olives closed around her, and with them the branching dates. Above, a star left by the morning glimmered feebly. In a myrtle a bird began to sing, and a lizard that had come out to intercept the sun scurried as she passed. Upward and onward still she went, and, the summit reached, for a moment she stopped and rested.

To the east the Dead Sea lay, a stretch of silk. At its edge was the flutter of ospreys feasting on the barbels and breams of the Jordan, which as they enter, die. Beyond was a glitter of white and gold, the scarp of Moriah and its breast of stone, the Tyrian bevel of Solomon, the porphyry of Nehemiah, the marble that Herod gave; ascending terraces, engulfing porticoes, the splendor of Jerusalem at dawn. Between the houses nearest was the dimness that shadows

cast; those further away had a scatter of pink; about it all was a wall surmounted by turrets; beneath was a ravine in which was a brook, and a city of booths and tents, grazing camels and fat-tailed sheep.

Through the pines and cypresses Mary passed down to where the olives were. The brook sent a message to her; the blood that had flowed from the sacrifices was in it, and in the fresh morning it reeked a little, as such brooks do. It was here, she thought, the Master had been taken, and for a second she stopped again. The sun now was rising behind her; the color of the sky shifted. Beyond Jerusalem a mountain was melting in excesses of vermilion, and the ravine that had been gray was assuming the tenderest green. The star had disappeared, but from each tree broke the greeting of a bird.

A rustle of the leaves near by startled her, and she looked about, fearful, as women are, of some beast of prey. A white robe was there, a white turban, and beneath it the swart face of one whom she had known.

To her eyes came massacres. "Judas!" she exclaimed, and looked up in that roof of her world where day puts its blue and night puts its black. "Judas!" she repeated. Her small hands clenched, and the rhymes of her mouth grew venomous.

Then the woman spoke in her. "Why did you not kill me first?"

Judas swayed like an ox hit on the forehead. The motion distracted and irritated her. "Can't you speak," she cried, "or does hell hold you, tongue and all?"

He raised a hand as though he feared another blow. The gesture was so human and yet so humble that Mary looked into his face. Time, which turns the sweet-eyed girl into a withered spectre, must have touched him with its thumb. His eyes were ringed and cavernous, his cheeks empty.

"You have heard, then?" he said; but he evinced no curiosity. He spoke with the apathy of one who takes everything for granted, one with whom fate is to have its will. "I have just come from

there," he added, with a backward gesture. "I never thought that such a thing could be. No, I swear it, I never did." Then, in answer perhaps to some inner twinge, perhaps also because of the expression of Mary's lips, he continued: "If there is a new oath, one that has never been used before, prompt me, and I will swear again, I never did. I thought——"

Mary interrupted him savagely: "There are ten kinds of hypocrisy. You have nine of them; you will develop the tenth and invent a new one besides."

At this Judas made a pass with his hands and stared absently at the ground. "Mary," he said, "life is a book which man reads when he dies. During the last hour I have been unrolling it. In its scroll I found existence a wine-shop where the guest fares so badly that he would go at once were it not that he fears to call for the reckoning. The reckoning, Mary, is death. I have called for it. I am about to pay. Let me tell you. I have no excuse to offer, no forgiveness now to await. My heart was a meadow: you made it stone.

There were well-springs in it: you dried them, Mary. When I first saw you, you were a dream fulfilled. Others had brought echoes of life; you brought its song. It was then that I heard the Master speak. I followed him, and tried to forget. It must be that I failed, for when I saw you in Capharnahum my blood danced, and when you spoke I trembled. It was love, Mary; and love, when it is not death, is life. It was that I sought at your side. You would not listen. Innocence is a garment. You seemed to have wrapped it about you. I tried to tear it away. There was my fault, and this my punishment. Your right was inflexible as a prison-door, and yet always behind it was the murmur of a mysterious Perhaps. The others turned to me; I turned to you. I forgot again, but this time it was my duty, my allegiance, and my faith. Mary, I loved the Master more wholly even than I loved you. He was the Spirit; you were the flesh. In him was the future; in you the tomb. I thought to conquer both. While I mixed my darkness with his light,

I pursued you as night pursues the day. On the light I have cast a shadow, and to you I have brought a blight. But, Mary, both will disappear. The one consolation I cling to now is that belief. When I delivered him up, it was myself I betrayed, not him. I am forever dead, and he forever living. While I bargained with the priests and pretended that my aim was coin, when I led the levites and the Temple-guard just here to where he stood, during all the hours since I left you, I tried to escape from that cage we call Fate. Mary, there is something about us higher than our will. The revenge I sought on you forsook me before I reached the city's gate. It is the intangible that has brought me where I am. I have sworn to you I never thought this thing could be. I swear it now again. In carrying out the threat I made, I thought to make you fear my hate and make him greater than he was. His enemies, I had seen, were many. Those that had believed in him grew daily less. In Jerusalem his miracles had ceased, and I thought that,

when the levites and the Temple-guard approached, he would speak with Samuel's thunder, answer with Elijah's flame. I thought the stars would shake, the moon grow red; that he would produce the lost Urim, the vanished Ark, and so forever silence disbelief. I was wrong, and he was right. Belief is in the heart, not in the senses; the visible contradicts, but faith is not to be confuted. No, Mary, the tombs are not dumb. I said so once, I know, but they answer, and mine will speak. On it perhaps a caricature may be daubed, and about it prejudice will uncoil. I deserve it. Yet though you think me wholly base, remember no man is that. Since I met you my life has been a battle-field in which I have fought with conscience. It has conquered. I am its slave; it commands, and I obey."

He drew a breath as though he had more to add, and turned to where she stood. There was no one there. From an olive-branch a red-start piped to the morning; over the buds of a pomegranate a bee buzzed its delight; across the leaves

of a myrtle a blue spider was busy with its web, but Mary was no longer there. He peered through the underbrush, and wandered to the grove beyond. There was no one. He looked to the hill-top: there was the advancing sun. He looked in the valley: there were the pilgrims' booths, the grazing camels and fat-tailed sheep.

"She has gone," he told himself. "She would not even listen."

He bent his head. For the first time since boyhood the tears rolled down his face.

"She might at least have heard me," he thought, and brushed the tears away. Others came and replaced them. When they had fallen, there were more.

"Yes, she might at least have listened. If I had no excuse to offer, at least I had regret." For a moment he fancied her, cruel as only woman is, hurrying to some unknown goal. The tears he had tried to stanch ceased now abruptly. "She is right," he mused. "She has left me to conscience and to death."

He turned again and went back to where he had stood before. As he crossed the intervening space he unloosed the long girdle which he wore, and from which still hung the treasury of the twelve. The bag that held it fell where the bee was buzzing. One end of the girdle he tossed over a branch; the redstart spread its wings and fled. He looked about. There was a stone near by; he got it and with a little labor rolled it beneath the branch. Then he made a noose, very carefully, that it might not come undone, and settling it well under the chin, he tied the other end of the girdle to it and swung himself from the stone.

CHAPTER IX.

IX.

In the apartment of Claudia Procula, Mary and the wife of the procurator stood face to face.

The apartment itself overlooked Jerusalem. Beneath was an open space tiled with little oblong stones, red, yellow, and blue; the blue predominating. On either side the colossal white wings of the palace stretched to a park, very green in the sunlight, cut by colonnades in which fountains were, and surrounded by a marble wall that was starred with turrets and fluttered with doves. The Temple, which, from its cressets, radiated to the hills beyond a glare of gold, was not as fair nor yet as vast as this. Within its gates an army could manœuvre; in its banquet-hall a cohort could have supped. It was Herod's triumph, built subsequent to the Temple, to show the world, perhaps, that

to surpass a masterpiece he had only to conceive another.

To it now and then, for a week or more, the procurator descended from his residence by the sea. He preferred the latter; the day was freer there, life less cramped. But during festival times, when the fanatic Jews were apt to be excited and need the chill of a curb, it was well for him and his soldiery to be on hand. And so on this occasion he had come, and with him his wife, Claudia Procula, and the tetrarch Antipas, who had joined them on the way.

Antipas and his retinue occupied the Ægrippeum, the north wing of the palace, while in the Cæsareum, the wing that leaned to the south, was Pilate, his wife and body-guard.

And now on this clear morning the sweet-faced patrician, Claudia Procula, with perfectly feminine curiosity was looking into the drawn features of the Magdalen, and wondering whence her rumored charm could come.

"I will do my best," she said, at last, in

answer to an anterior request. And calling a servant, she wrote on a tablet a word for Pilate's eye.

Mary moved to the portico. The variegated tiles of the quadrangle were nearly covered now. A flight of wide, low steps led to the main entrance of the palace, and there a high seat of enamelled ebony had been placed. In it Pilate sat, in his hand the staff of office. Beside him were his assessors, members of his suite, and Calcol, a centurion. On one of the steps Caiaphas stood, near him the elders of the college. Below was the Christ, bound and guarded. Across the quadrangle was a line of soldiery, behind it a mob.

The helmets, glancing mail, short skirts, and bare legs of the Romans contrasted refreshingly with the blossoming garments, effeminate girdles, frontlets, and horned blue bonnets of the priesthood. And in the riot of color and glint of steel the Christ, bound as he was, looked, in the simplicity of his seamless robe, the descendant of a larger sphere. Above,

to the left, Antipas, aroused by the clamor, leaned from a portico. Opposite where the sunlight fell Mary held her cloak about her.

Caiaphas, a hand indicating Jesus, his head turned to Pilate, was formulating a complaint. Not indeed that the prisoner had declared himself a divinity. There were far too many gods in the menagerie of the Pantheon for a procurator to be the least disturbed at the rumor of a new one. It was the right to rule, that attribute of the Messiah, on which he intended the gravamen of the charge should rest. But he began circuitously, feeling the way, in Greek at that, with an accent which might have been improved.

"And so," he concluded, "in many ways he has transgressed the Law."

"Why don't you judge him by it, then?" asked Pilate, grimly.

A servant approached with a tablet. The procurator glanced at it, looked up at the man, and motioned him away.

"My lord governor, we have. The Sanhedrim, having found him guilty, has

sentenced him to death. But the Sanhedrim, as you know, may not execute the sentence. The Senate has deprived us of that right. It is for you, as its legate, to order it done,"

Pilate sneered. "I can't very well, until I know of what he is guilty. What crime has he committed—written a letter on the Sabbath, or has he been caught without his phylacteries?"

"He has declared himself Israel's king!"

"Ah!" And Pilate smiled wearily. "You are always expecting one; why not take him?"

"Why not, my lord? Because it is treason to do so."

Pilate nodded with affected approval. "I admire your zeal." And with a glance at the prisoner, he added: "You have heard the accusation; defend yourself. What!" he continued, after a moment, "have you nothing to say?"

Caiaphas exulted openly. The corners of his mouth had the width and cruelty, and his nostrils the dilation, of a wolf.

"My lord," he cried, "his silence is an admission."

"Hold your tongue! It is for me to question." And therewith Pilate gave the high-priest a look which was tantamount to a knee pressed on the midriff. He glanced again at the tablet, then at the prisoner.

"Tell me, do you really claim to be king?"

"Is it your idea of me?" the Christ asked; and in his bearing was a dignity which did not clash with the charge; "or have others prompted you?"

"But I am not a Jew," Pilate retorted. "The matter only interests me officially. It is your hierarchy that bring the charge. Why have they? What have you done? Tell me," he continued, in Latin, "do you think yourself King?"

"*Tu dixisti*," Jesus answered, and smiled as he had before, very gravely. "But my royalty is not of the earth." And with a glance at his bonds, one which was so significant that it annulled the charge, he

added, still in Latin, "I am Truth, and I preach it."

Pilate with skeptical indulgence shook his head. Truth to him was an elenchicism, an abstraction of the Platonists, whom in Rome he had respected for their wisdom and avoided with care. He turned to Caiaphas. The latter had been regretting the absence of an interpreter. This amicable conversation, which he did not understand, was not in the least to his liking, and as Pilate turned to him he frowned in his beard.

"I am unable to find him guilty," the procurator announced. "He may call himself king, but every philosopher does the same. You might yourself, for that matter."

"A philosopher, this mesîth!" Caiaphas gnashed back. "Why, he seduces the people; he incites to sedition; he is a rebel to Rome. It is for you, my lord, to see the empire upheld. Would it be well to have another complaint laid before the Cæsar? Ask yourself, is this Galilean worth it?"

The thrust was as keen and as venomous as the tooth of a rat. Pilate had been rebuked by the emperor already; he had no wish to incur further displeasure. Sejanus, the emperor's favorite, to whom he owed his procuratorship, had for suspected treason been strangled in a dumb dungeon only a little before. Under Tiberius there was quiet, a future historian was to note; and Pilate was aware that, should a disturbance occur, the disturbance would be quelled, but at his expense.

An idea presented itself. "Did I understand you to say he is a Galilean?" he asked.

"Yes," Caiaphas answered, expecting, perhaps, the usual jibe that was flung at those who came from there. "Yes, he is a Nazarene."

"Hm. In that case I have no jurisdiction. The tetrarch is my guest; take your prisoner to him."

"My lord," the high-priest objected, "our law is such that if we enter the

palace we cannot officiate at the Passover to-night."

Pilate appeared to reflect. "I suppose," he said at last, "I might ask him whether he would care to come here. In which case," he added, with a gesture of elaborate courtesy, "you may remain uncontaminated where you are. Ressala!"

An official stepped forward; an order was given; he disappeared. Presently a massive throne of sandalwood and gold was trundled out. Caiaphas had seen it before, and in it—Herod.

"The justice that comes from there," he muttered, "is as a snake that issues from a tomb."

His words were drowned in the clamors of the crowd. The sun had crossed the zenith; in its rays the waters that gushed from the fountain-mouths of bronze lions fell in rainbows and glistened in great basins that glistened too. There was sunlight everywhere, a sky of untroubled blue, and from the Temple beyond came a glare that radiated from Olivet to Bethlehem.

Pilate was bored. The mantle which Mary wore caught his eye, and he looked at her, wondering how she came in his wife's apartment, and where he had seen her before. Her face was familiar, but the setting vague. Then at once he remembered. It was at Machærus he had seen her, gambling with the emir, while Salomè danced. She was with Antipas, of course. He looked again; she had gone.

The Sanhedrim consulted nervously. The new turn of affairs was not at all to their liking. The clamors of the mob continued. Once a fanatic pushed against a soldier. There was a thud, a howl, and a mouth masked with liquid red gasped to the sun and was seen no more.

Behind the procurator came a movement. The officials massed about the entrance parted in uneven ranks, and in the great vestibule beyond, Antipas appeared. Pilate rose to greet him. The elders made obeisance. The tetrarch moved forward and seated himself in his father's throne. At his side was Pahul,

the butler, balancing himself flamingo-wise on one leg, his bold eyes foraging the priests.

Caiaphas formulated the complaint anew, very majestically this time, and, thinking perhaps to overawe the tetrarch, his voice assumed the authority of a guardian of the keys of heaven, a chamberlain of the sceptres of the earth.

Antipas ignored him utterly. He plucked at his fan-shaped beard, and stared at the Christ. He could see now he bore no resemblance to Iohanan. There was nothing of the hyena about him, nor of the prophet either. Evidently he was but a harmless vagabond, skilled in simples, if report were true; perhaps a thaumaturge. And it was he whom he had feared and fancied might be that Son of David for whom a star was created, whom the magi had visited, whom his father had sought to destroy, and whom now from his father's own throne he himself was called upon to judge! He shook his head, and in the sunlight the indigo

with which his hair was powdered made bright blue motes.

"I say——"

Just beyond, where the assessors stood, Mary suddenly appeared. He stopped abruptly; for more than a year he had not seen her. Pahul had told him she had gone to Rome. If she had, he reflected, the journey had not improved her appearance. Then for the moment he dismissed her, and returned to the Christ.

"See here: somebody the other day told me you worked miracles. I have wanted to see one all my life. Gratify me, won't you? Oh, something very easy to begin with. Send one of the guards up in the air, or turn your bonds into bracelets."

The Christ did not seem to hear. Pahul laughed and held to the throne for support. Antipas shrugged his shoulders.

"He looks harmless enough," he said. "Why not let him go?"

Caiaphas glowered, and his fingers twitched. "He claims to be king!"

At this statement the tetrarch laughed too. He gave an order to Pahul, who vanished with a grin.

"He has jeered at the Temple your father built," Caiaphas continued. "He has declared he could destroy it and rebuild a better one, in three days at that."

"He *is* king, then, but of fools."

"And he has called you a fox," Caiaphas added, significantly.

"He doesn't claim to be one himself, does he?"

"He is guilty of treason, and it is for you, his ruler, to sentence him."

"Not I. The blood of kings is sacred. Pahul, make haste!"

The butler, reappearing, held in his hand the glittering white vestment of a candidate. The tetrarch took it and held it in air.

"Here, put this on him, and let his subjects admire him to their hearts' content."

"Antipas, you disgrace your purple!"

At the exclamation, the Sanhedrim, the guards, the assessors, the officials, Pilate himself, everyone save the prisoner, turned and looked. On the colored pavement Mary stood, her face very pale.

The tetrarch flushed mightily; anger mounted into his shifting eyes. For a moment the sky was blood-red; then he recovered himself and answered lightly:

"It seems to me, my dear, that you take things with a high hand. It may be that you forget yourself."

"I take them from where I am," she cried. "As for forgetfulness, remember that my grandfather was satrap of Syria, my father after him, while yours——"

"Yes, yes, I dare say. He is not in power now; I am."

"Not here, Antipas, nor in Rome. I appeal to Pilate."

The tetrarch rose from the throne. The elders whispered together. Pilate visibly was perplexed. Remembering Mary as he did, he looked upon the incident as a family quarrel, one in which it

would be unseemly for him to interfere, and which none the less disturbed the decorum of his court.

Caiaphas edged up to the tetrarch, but the latter brushed him aside.

"The hetaira is right," he exclaimed. "I am not in power here. If I were, she should be lapidated."

And, preceded by the butler, Antipas passed through the parting ranks to the vestibule beyond.

The perplexity of the procurator increased. He did not in the least understand. To him Mary stood in the same relation to Antipas that Cleopatra had to Herod. There had been a feud between the tetrarch and himself, one recently mended, and which he had no wish to renew. Yet manifestly Antipas was aggrieved, and his own path in the matter by no means clear.

"Bah!" he muttered, in the consoling undertone of thought, "what are their beastly barbarian manners to me?"

These reflections Caiaphas interrupted.

"We are waiting, my lord, for the sentence to be pronounced."

The tone he used was not, however, indicative of patience, and in conjunction with the incident that had just occurred it irritated and jarred. Besides, Pilate did not care to be prompted. It was for him to speak first. He strangled an oath, and, gathering some fringe of the majesty of Rome, he announced very measuredly:

"You have brought this man before me as a rebel. I have examined him and find no ground for the charge. His ruler, the tetrarch, has also examined him, and by him too he has been acquitted. But in view of the fact that he appears to have contravened some one or another of your laws I order him to be scourged and to be liberated."

With that he turned to the prisoner. During the entire proceedings the attitude of Jesus had not altered. He stood as a disinterested spectator might—one whom chance had brought that way and there hemmed in—his eyes on remote, inacces-

sible horizons, the tongue silent, the head a little raised.

"Scourging, my lord," Caiaphas interjected, "is fit and proper, but," he continued, one silk-gloved hand uplifted, "our law prescribes death. Only an enemy to Tiberius would prevent it."

At the veiled menace Pilate gnawed his under lip. He had no faith at all in the loyalty of the hierarch; at any other time the affection the latter manifested for the chains he bore would have been ludicrous and nothing else. But at the moment he felt insecure. There were Galileans whom he had sacrificed, Judæans whom he had slaughtered, Samaritans whom he had oppressed, an embassy might even now be on its way to Rome; he thought again of Sejanus, and, with cause, he hesitated. Yet of the inward perturbation he gave no outward sign.

"On this day," he said at last, "it is customary that in commemoration of your nation's delivery out of Egypt I should release a prisoner to you. There

are three others here, among them Jesus Barabba."

Then, for support perhaps, he looked over at the clamoring mob.

"I will leave the choice to the people."

A wind seemed to raise the elders; they scattered through the court like leaves. "Have done with the Nazarene," cried one. "He would lead you astray," insinuated another. "He has violated the Law," exclaimed a third.

And, filtering through the soldiery into the mob without, they exhorted and prayed and coerced. "Ask for Barabba; denounce the blasphemer. Trust to the Sanhedrim. We are your guides. Let him atone for his crimes. The God of your fathers commands that you condemn. Demand Barabba; uphold your nation. To the cross with the Nazarene!"

"Whom do you choose?" shouted Pilate.

And the pleb of Jerusalem shouted back as one man, "Barabba!"

At the moment Pilate fancied himself in an amphitheatre, the arena filled with

beasts. There were the satin and stripes of the panther, the yellow of treacherous eyes, the gnash of fangs, the guttural rumble, the deafening yell, the scent of blood, and above, the same blue tender sky.

"What of the prisoner?" he called.

A roar leapt back. "Sekaph! Sekaph! Let him be crucified."

Pilate had fronted a rabble before, and in two minutes had turned that rabble into so many dead flies, the legs in the air. He shook his head, and told himself he was not there to be coerced.

"Release Barabba," he ordered. "And as for the prisoner, take him to the barracks and have him scourged."

"Brute!" cried a voice that lifted him as a blow might from his ebony chair. "Pilate, though you are a plebeian, why show yourself a slave?"

And Mary, with the strength of anger, brushed through the encircling officials and towered before him, robed in wrath.

"Ah, permit me," he answered; "you are singularly unjust."

"Prove me so, and countermand the order that you gave."

As she spoke she adjusted her mantle, which had become disarranged, and looked him from head to foot, measuring him as it were, and finding him, visibly, very small.

Already the prisoner had been led away, and beyond, in the barracks, was the whiz of jagged leather that lacerated, rebounded, and lacerated again.

"I will not," he answered. "What I have ordered, I have ordered. As for you——"

There had come to her that look which sibyls have. "Pilate," she interrupted, "you are powerful here, I know, but"—and her hand shot out like an arrow from a bow—"over there vultures are circling; in your power is a corpse. What the vultures scent, I see."

So abrupt and earnest was the gesture that unconsciously Pilate found himself looking to where she seemed to point. He lowered his eyes in vexation. Wrangling with a woman was not to his taste.

"There, there," he said, much as one might to a fretful child; "don't throw stones."

"I have but one; it is Justice, and that I keep to hurl at you."

The procurator's mouth twitched ominously. "My dear," he said, "you are too pretty to talk that way; it spoils the looks. Besides, I have no time to listen."

"Tiberius has and will."

Pilate nodded; it was the third time he had heard the threat that day.

"There are many rooms in his palace," he answered, with covert significance.

"Yes, I know it. There are many, as you say. But there is one I will enter. On the door stands written The Future, and behind it, Pilate, is your death."

The Roman, goaded to exasperation, sprang to his feet. An expression which Antipas had used occurred to him. "Away with the hetaira," he cried; and he was about, it may be, to order her to be tossed to the fierce wild swine in the paddocks of the park when the prisoner and his guards reappeared on the tessel-

lated pavement, and Mary, already dragged from him, was instantly forgot.

A tattered sagum, which had once been scarlet, but which had faded since, hung, detained at the shoulder by a rusty buckle, and bordered by a laticlave, loosely about his form. In his hand a bulrush swayed; on his head was a twisted coil of bear's-breech, in which, among the ruffled leaves, one bud remained; it was white, the opening edges flecked with pink, perhaps with blood, for from the temples and about the ear a rill ran down and mixed with the purple of the laticlave below. And in this red parody of kingship the Christ stood, unmoved as a phantom, but in his face and eyes there was a projecting light so luminous, so intangible, and yet so real, that the skeptical procurator started, the staff of office pendent in his grasp.

"Ecce homo!" he exclaimed. Instinctively he drew back, and, wonderingly, half to himself, half to the Christ, "Who are you?" he asked.

"A flame below, a soul above," Jesus

answered, yet so inaudibly that the guards beside him did not catch the words.

To Pilate his lips had barely moved, and his wonderment increased. "Why do you not answer?" he said. "You must know that I have the power to condemn and to acquit."

With that gentleness that was the flower of his parables Jesus raised his voice. "No," he replied, "you can have no power against me unless it come from above."

Again Pilate drew back. Unsummoned to his lips had sprung the words, "Behold the man!" and now he exclaimed, "Behold the king!"

But to the mob the vision he intercepted was lost. They saw the jest merely, and with it the stains that torture leaves. The sight of blood is heady; it inebriates more surely than wine. The mob, trained by the elders, and used by them as a body-guard, fanatic before, were intoxicated now. With one accord they shrieked the liturgy again.

"Sekaph! Sekaph! Let him be crucified."

In that gust of hatred Pilate recovered. He turned to Caiaphas :

"I have released one prisoner ; I will release another too."

"My lord, be warned by one who is your elder."

"One whom I can remove."

"No doubt, my lord ; but suffer him while he may to warn you not to cause a revolution on the day of the Paschal feast. You hear that multitude. Then be warned."

"But your feast is one of mercy."

The high-priest gazed curiously at his silk-gloved hands. You would have said they were objects he had never seen before. Then he returned the procurator's stare.

"We know of no such god."

"Ah!" And the procurator drew a long breath of understanding. "It is that, I believe, he preaches."

"And it is for that," Caiaphas echoed, "that he must die. Yes, Pilate, it is for that. There is no such doctrine in the Pentateuch. We have done our duty.

We have convicted a rebel of his guilt. We have brought him to you, and we demand his sentence. Pilate, it is not so very long ago you had hundreds massacred without judgment, without trial either, and for what?—for one rebellious cry. You must have a reason for the favor you show this man. It would interest me to learn it; it would interest Tiberius as well. Listen to that multitude. If you pay no heed to our accusation nor yet to their demand, on you the consequences rest. We are absolved."

"He is your king," the procurator objected, meditatively.

Caiaphas wheeled like a feather a breeze has caught. One hand outstretched he held to the mob, with the other he pointed to the Christ.

"Our king!" he cried. "The procurator says he is our king!"

As the thunder peals, a roar surged back:

"We have no other king than Cæsar."

"Think of Sejanus," the high-priest

suggested. The thrust was so well timed it told.

Pilate looked sullenly about. "Fetch me water," he ordered.

A silver bowl was brought, and borrowing a custom from the Jews he loathed, he dipped his fingers in it.

"I wash my hands of it all," he muttered.

Caiaphas looked at the elders and sighed with infinite relief. He had conquered. For the first time that day he smiled. He became gracious also, and he bowed.

"The blood be upon us, my lord, and on our children. Will you give the order?"

"Calcol!"

The centurion approached. An order was given him in an undertone, and as he turned to the guards, Pilate drew the staff of office across his knee, snapped it in two, tossed the pieces to the ground, and through the ranks of his servitors passed on into the great blue vestibule beyond.

CHAPTER X.

X.

In a sook near the Gannath Gate Mary stood. In the distance the palace of Herod defied the sun. Beyond the gate lay the Hennom Valley, the Geia Hennom, contracted by the people into Ge' Hennom, or Gehenna, and converted by them into a sewer, a place where carrion was thrown, and the filth of a great city. In earlier days children had been immolated to Moloch there, human victims had been burned; it was a place accursed, and to purify the air, as a safeguard against pestilence, the offal was consumed by bonfires that were constantly renewed and never extinguished. At its extremity was an elevation, a hilly contour which to the popular fancy suggested a skull. To the west it fell steeply away. It was called Gülgolta.

The sook in which Mary stood was

affected by shoemakers. Against the dwelling of one of them she leaned. The mantle was gone from her now, and the olive robe had a rent, but the splendor of her hair fell unconfined, the perils of her eyes had increased; yet in their depths where love had been was hate. One arm lay along the resisting stone, the other hung at her side; her face was turned to the palace, her thin nostrils quivering, her breath coming and going with that spasmodic irregularity which the consciousness of outrage brings. She laid it all to Judas; he must have returned to Kerioth, she thought. The sook itself was silent, stirred merely by some echo of the uproar in the palace beyond.

From a grilled lattice near by an old man peered out. He had the restless eyes of a ferret, and a white beard that was very long. He too was looking toward the palace. Now and then he muttered inaudibly in Aramaic to himself. In the shadow of a neighboring house a woman appeared; he shook at the lattice as an ape does at the bars of a cage, and

spat a bestial insult at her. The woman shrank back. Instinctively Mary turned. In the retreating figure she recognized Ahulah, and at once, without conscious effort, she divined that the dwelling against which she leaned was that of Baba Barbulah, the husband of the woman whom the Master had declined to condemn.

But other things possessed her—the outrage to the Christ, perplexity as to how the trial would result, more remotely the indignity to herself, the slurs of the tetrarch and of the procurator; and with them, sapping her heart as fever might, was that thirst for reparation, unquenchable in its intensity, which comes to those who have seen their own life wrecked and its ideals dispersed.

Already Ahulah was forgot. On the wings of vagabond fancy she was in Rome, demanding vengeance of Tiberius, wresting it from him by the sheer force of entreaty, and with it exulting in the death-throes of the procurator. Oh, to see his nails pulled out, his outer skin removed,

his tongue severed, his eyes seared with irons, his wrists slowly twisted till they snapped! to hear him cry for mercy! to promise it and not fulfil!—dear God, what joy was there!

From the alley into which Ahulah had shrunk a man issued. He was sturdy as a bludgeon, and he had a growth of thick black hair that curled about an honest face. In his hand was a basket. At the sight of Mary his steps hesitated, and his eyes followed hers to where the palace lay. Then he crossed the zigzag of the intervening space, but he had to touch her outstretched arm before she noticed him.

"Simon!" she exclaimed, with that start one has when suddenly awaked.

"Yes, Simon indeed;" and through the silence of the sook his clear laugh rang. "I frightened you, did I not?"

Mary interrupted him. "Haven't you heard? Has not Eleazer told you——"

"When I left Bethany he was sleeping with both fists closed. Martha——"

"The Master is arrested. Last night

he was before the Sanhedrim; he is before the procurator now."

Hurriedly Mary gave an account of what had occurred. As the recital continued, Simon's expression grew darker than his curling hair, he clutched at the basket which he held, so tightly that the handle severed, the basket fell, and fruit that imprisoned the sunlight rolled on the ground.

"They were for the Master," he said. "I thought he would sup with us to-night."

"He may do so yet," she answered. "Perhaps——"

"Never!" cried a voice from the lattice. "They are leading him to Gülgolta now."

Beyond, through the palace gate, a mass undulated, the body elongated, expanding as it moved. It was black, but at the sides was the glisten that cobras have. About it dust circled, and from it came the rumble of thunder heard afar. As the bulk increased, the roar deepened; the black lessened into varying hues. To the glisten came the glint of

steel; the cobra changed into a multitude, the escort of a squad of soldiery, fronted by a centurion and led by the banner of Imperial Rome.

Behind the centurion, Jesus, in his faded sagum, staggered, overweighted by the burden of a cross. Two comrades in misery were at his side, but they moved with steadier step, bearing their crosses with the brawn of muscular and untired arms. The soldiers marched impassibly, preceding the executioners —four stalwart Cypriotes, distinguishable by the fatness of their calves—while behind was the Sanhedrim, and, extending indefinitely to the rear, the rabble of yelling Jews.

In a cobra's coils is death, its eyes transfix. Neither Mary nor Simon had spoken, and now, as the soldiery was upon them, they leaned yet nearer the wall. For a moment Mary hid her face. At her feet the Christ had fallen, and from her came one wail, choked down at once. She stooped to aid him, but he

stood up unassisted and reached to the wall for support.

The bars of the lattice shook; the old man peered out.

"Don't touch my house, you vagabond! Move on!" he cried.

Calcol had turned to Simon, who was raising the cross. "Carry it for him," he commanded.

Baba Barbulah still shook at the lattice. "Move on!" he repeated. "Seducer of the people, remitter of sins, upholder of adultery, move on; don't touch my house, it will fall down on you! Move on, I say!"

Calcol's command Simon had anticipated. He shouldered the cross. It was heavier to him than to the Christ, not in weight, perhaps, but in purpose. In the narrowness of the sook the crowd was impeded, but from the rear they pushed, surprised at the halt.

Mary sprang at the lattice. "It is you that shall move on," she cried; "yes, you; and forever. The desert will call to you, 'March;' and the sea will snarl,

'Further yet.' The gates of cities will deny you, and the doors of hamlets be closed. The eagles may return to their eyrie, the panthers retreat to their lair, but you will have no home, no rest, and, till time dies, no tomb."

The old man gnashed back at her an insult more bestial than he used before, and spat at her through the bars. But Mary had turned to the Christ. He was surrounded now by some women who had filtered through the alley above. Johanna, Mary Clopas, the wife of Zebdia, and Bernice, a fragile girl newly enrolled. The latter was wiping from his face the stains of blood and dust. The others were beating their breasts, crying aloud.

Of the disciples there was no trace, nor yet of any of those who had greeted him as the Messiah. It may be that the admiring throngs that had gathered about him had faded before a superior force. It may be they had lost heart, belief perhaps as well. Invective never propitiates. Recently he had omitted to

prophesy, he argued. The exquisite parables with which he had been wont to charm even the recalcitrant seemed to have been put aside, and with them those wonders which rumor held him to have worked. But now that pathos and grace which endeared, that perfection of sentiment and expression which exalted the heart, returned to him, accentuated perhaps by the agonies he had endured.

"Weep for me no more," he entreated. "But weep for yourselves and for your children. The days are coming," he added, with a gesture at the impatient mob—"the days are coming in which they shall say to the mountains, Fall on us; to the hills, Cover us. For if these things are done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?"

And in this entreaty, in which he exhorted them to view disaster otherwise than from the external and evanescent aspect, the voice of the prophet rang once more.

Mary as yet had not realized the full portent of the soldiery and the mob.

When it was approaching it had occurred to her that it might be another triumphal escort, such as she had once seen surround him on his way to a feast. As it advanced, the roar bewildered, and she had ceased to conjecture; then the Master had fallen, and the old Jew had vomited his slime. At the moment it was that, and that only, which had impressed her, and she had answered with the force of that new strength which suddenly she had found. But now at the sight of the women beating their breasts, and the blood-stained face of the Master, an inkling came to her; she stared open-mouthed at the cross, at Calcol, and at the executioners that were there.

Then immediately that horrible longing to know the worst beset her, and she darted to where the centurion stood.

"What is it?" she gasped. "What are you to do with him?"

By way of answer Calcol extended his arms straight out from either side, his head thrown back. He was a good-natured ruffian, with clear and pleasant eyes.

"Not crucify?" she cried. "Tell me, it is not that?"

Calcol nodded. To him one Jew more, one Jew less, was immaterial, provided he had his pay, and the prospect of a return to Rome was not too long delayed. Yet none the less in some misty way he wondered why this woman, with her splendid hair and scorching eyes, should have upbraided the tetrarch and abused the procurator because of the friendless Galilean whom he was leading to the cross. Woman to him, however, was, as she has been to others wiser than he, an enigma he failed to solve. And so he nodded merely, not unkindly, and smiled in Mary's face.

The horrible longing now was stilled. She knew the worst; yet as the knowledge of it penetrated her being, it seemed to her as though it could not be true, that she was the plaything of some hallucination, her mind inhabited by a nightmare from which she must presently awake. The howl of the impatient mob undeceived her. It was real; it was actual;

it was life. She stared at Calcol, her fair mouth agape. There were many things she wanted to say; her thoughts teemed with arguments, her mind with persuasions; but she could utter nothing; she was as one struck dumb; and it was not until the centurion smiled that the spell dissolved and the power of speech returned.

"Ah, *that* never; you shall kill me first!" she cried. And already she saw herself circumventing the centurion, blinding the soldiery, defying the mob, and leading the Master through byways and underground passages out of the accursed city into the fresh glades of Gethsemane, over the hill, down the hollows to the Jordan, and into the desert beyond. There was one spot she knew very well; one that only a bird could find; one that she would mention to no one, but to which she could take him and keep him hidden there in the brakes till night came, and the fording of the river was safe.

"That never!" she cried. And brush-

ing Bernice off, she caught the Master by the cloak. "Come with me," she murmured. "I know a way——"

And she would have dragged him perhaps, regardless of the others, but the centurion had her by the arm.

"See here, my pretty friend, your place is not here."

With a twist he sent her spinning back to Baba Barbulah's wall.

"March!" he ordered.

The soldiery, disarranged, fell in line. The two robbers picked up their burden. The Master turned to Mary, to the others as well, with that expression which he alone possessed, that look which both promised and assuaged, and, it may be, would have said some word of encouragement, but Mary was at his side again, her hand upon his cloak.

"It shall never be," she repeated. "They must kill me first."

Calcol wheeled. His short sword glistened, reversed, and her cheek was laid open by the hilt. She staggered back. The soldiery moved on. The

women surrounded her and stanched the wound. To her the blow held the difference between a cut and a cancer; she knew that it could never heal; and, as the blood poured down her face, for the first time she divined the uselessness of revolt.

Presently a wave of the mob caught her, separating her from the other women, and carrying her in its eddy through the gate, into the valley and on to the hillock beyond. On one side were the glimmer of fires, the smell of smoke, of offal too. On the infrequent trees vultures perched. To the right was a nest of gardens and of tombs.

In the eddies Mary lost foothold and lagged a little to the rear. When she reached Gūlgolta the soldiery had formed three sides of a square. In it were the executioners, the prisoners, and the centurion. At the place where a fourth side might have been a steep decline began.

Within the square three crosses lay; before them the prisoners stood, stripped of their clothing now, and naked.

The Sanhedrim was grouped about

that side of the square which leaned to the south, the horned bonnet of Caiaphas towering its lacework above the others. To the wide and cruel corners of his mouth had come the calm of a cheetah devouring its prey. At the outer angle, to the right, the standard of the empire swayed; and from an oak two vultures soared with a scream into the air, their eyes fixed on the vision of bare white flesh.

Through the ranks an elder passed. In his hand was a gourd, which he offered to one of the thieves.

"Drink of it, Dysmas," he invited. "In it grains of frankincense have been dissolved."

To the rear Annas nodded his approval. His lean, lank jaws parted. "Give strong drink," he announced, authoritatively; "give strong and heady drink to those about to die, and wine to those that sorrow."

Dysmas drank abundantly of the soporific, and held the gourd to his comrade.

"Take it, Stegas."

As the second thief raised it to his lips, with a motion of arm and knee an executioner caught Dysmas beneath the chin, behind the leg, and the thief lay on a cross. In a second his wrists were bound, his feet as well. There was the blow of a hammer on a nail, a spurt of blood from the open hand; another blow, another spurt; and the cross, upraised, settled in a cavity already prepared, a beam behind it for support.

Stegas, his thirst slaked, fell as Dysmas had, and the elder caught the gourd and offered it to the Christ. If he had been tempted in the desert, as rumor alleged, the temptation could have been as nothing in comparison to the enticements of that cup. It held relief from thought, from the acutest pain that flesh can know, from life, from death.

He waved it aside. The executioner started with surprise; but he had his duty to perform, and, recovering himself, he caught the Christ, and in a moment he too was down, his hands transfixed, the cross upraised. The blood dripped lei-

surely on the sand beneath. Across his features a shadow passed and vanished. His lips moved.

"Father," he murmured, "forgive them; they know not what they do."

Calcol gave an order. Over the heads of Dysmas and of Stegas the sanis were affixed, wooden tablets smeared with gypsum, bearing the name of the crucified and with it the offence. They were simple and terse; but above the Christ appeared a legend in three tongues, in Aramaic, in Greek, and in Latin:

שוהיטרי מיד דוהודים.

Ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.

Rex Judæorum.

Caiaphas sprang back as from the point of a sword.

"Mâlkâ dî Jehudâje!" he bellowed. "King of the Jews! It is a blasphemy, an iniquity, and an outrage. Centurion, tear it down."

Calcol shrugged his shoulders, and pointed to the palace. "What the procurator has written he has written," he answered.

In the tone, in the gesture that preceded it, and in its impertinence Caiaphas read Pilate's one yet supreme revenge, the expression of his absolute contempt for the whole Sanhedrim and the nation that it ruled.

From the rear the mob jumped at the title as at a catchword. To them the irony of the procurator presumably was lost.

"King of the Jews!" they shouted. "Mâlkâ dî Jehudâje, come down from your cross!"

It was a great festival, and as they jeered at Jesus they enjoyed themselves hugely.

In their vast delight the voice of Stegas was drowned.

"I am a Roman citizen," he kept repeating, his head swaying, and indicating with his eyes the wounds in his hands, the torture he endured. "Kill me," he implored. And finding entreaty idle, he reviled the centurion, cursed the soldiery, and would have spat at them, but to his burning throat no spittle came.

The tongue of Dysmas lolled from his mouth. He had not the ability to speak, even if in speech relief could come. Flame licked at his flesh, his joints were severing, each artery was a nerve exposed, and something was crunching his brain. He could no longer groan; he could suffer merely, such suffering as hell perhaps has failed to contrive, that apogee of agony which it was left for man to devise.

Stegas, catching the refrain the mob repeated, turned his eyes from the soldiery to the adjacent cross.

"If you are as they say," he cried, "save yourself and us."

As a taunt to Caiaphas, Calcol echoed, "Behold your king!" and raising a stalk of hyssop, on which was a sponge that he had dipped in the posca, the thin wine the soldiers drink, he offered it to the Christ.

The sun was nearing the horizon. Caiaphas gathered his ample folds about him. He had seen enough. The feast, wretchedly embittered, was nearly done.

There was another at which he must officiate: the shofa presently would sound; the skewering of the Paschal lamb it was needful for him to superintend. It was time, he knew, to return to the Temple; and as he gave a last indignant look at the placard, the lips of the Christ parted to one despairing cry:

"Elî, Elî, lemâh shebâktanî?"

Caiaphas, nodding to the elders, smiled with satisfaction.

At last the false pretender was forced to acknowledge the invalidity of his claims. The Father whose son he vaunted himself to be had disowned him when his recognition was needed, if ever it had been needed at all. And so, with the smile of one whose labor has had its recompense, Caiaphas patted his skirt, and the elders about him strolled back through the Gannath Gate to the Temple that awaited him.

The multitude meanwhile had decreased. To the crowd also the Temple had its attractions, its duties, and its offices. Moreover, the spectacle was at

an end. With a blow of the mallet the legs of the thieves had been broken. They had died without a shriek, a thing to be regretted. The Galilean too, pierced by the level stroke of a spear, had succumbed without a word. Sundown was approaching. Clearly it was best to be within the walls where other gayeties were. The mob dispersed, leaving behind but the dead, the circling vultures, a group of soldiers throwing dice for the garments of the crucified, and, remotely, a group of women huddled beneath a protecting oak.

During the hour or two that intervened, the force which had visited Mary evaporated in strength overtaxed. She was conscious only that she suffocated. The words of the women that had drawn her to them were empty as blanks in a dream; the jeers of the mob vacant as an empty bier. To but one thing was she alive, the fact that death could be. Little by little, as the impossible merged into the actual, the understanding came to her that the worst that could be had been

done, and she ceased to suffer. The departing hierarchy, the dispersing mob, retreating before encroaching night, left her unimpressed. To her the setting sun was Christ.

The soldiers passed. She did not see them. Calcol called to her. She did not hear. The women had gone from her ; she did not notice it. She stood as a cataleptic might, her eyes on the cross. Once only, when the Christ had uttered his despairing cry, she too had cried in her despair. In the roar of the mob the cry was lost as a stone tossed in the sea. Since then she had been dumb, sightless also, existing, if at all, unconsciously, her life-springs nourished by death.

Though she gazed at the cross, she had ceased to distinguish it. A little group that had reached it before the soldiery left had been unmarked by her. On the platform of her dream a serpent had emerged. In its coils were her immortal hopes. It was that she saw, and that alone. Those moments of agony in which the imagination oscillates between

the past and the future, devouring the one, fumbling the other, had been endured, and resignation failed to bring its balm. She had believed with a faith so firm that now in its demolition there was nothing left—an abyss merely, where light was not.

A hand touched her, and she quivered as a leaf does at the wing of a bird. "Mary, come with us," some one was saying; "we are taking him to a tomb."

Just beyond were men and women whom she knew. Joseph of Haramathaïm, a close follower of the Master; Nikodemon, the richest man in all Judæa; Johanna, Mary Clopas, Salomè, Bernice, and the servants of the opulent Jew. It was Ahulah who had touched her; and as Mary started she saw before her a coffin which the others bore.

"Come with us," Ahulah repeated; and Mary crossed the intervening ridge to where the gardens were and the tombs she had already passed.

At the door of a sepulchre the brief procession halted. Within was a room,

a little grotto furnished with a stone slab and a lamp that flickered, surmounted by an arch. The coffin, placed on the slab, routed a bat that flew to the arch, and a lizard that scurried to a crevice. In the coffin the Christ lay, his head wrapped in a napkin, the body wound about by broad bands of linen that were secured with gum and impregnated with spices and with myrrh. The odor of aromatics filled the tomb. The bat escaped to the night. A stone was rolled before the opening, the brief procession withdrew, and Mary was left with the dead.

The momentary exertion, the bier, the sepulchre, the sight of the Christ in his cerements, the brooding quiet—these things had roused her. Her mind was nimbler, and thought more active. One by one the stars appeared. They would vanish, she told herself, as her hopes had done. Only they would reappear, and belief could not. It had come as a rainbow does, and disappeared as vaporously, little by little, before the full glare of might. For a minute, hours perhaps, she

stood quite still, interrogating the past in which so much had been, gauging the future in which so much was to be. The one retreated, the other fled. Thoughts came to her evanescently, and faded before they were wholly formed. At one moment she was beckoning the unicorns from the desert, the winged lions from the yonderland, commanding them to bear her to the home of some immense revenge. At others she was asking her way of griffins, propounding the problem to the Sphinx. But the unicorns and lions took flight, the griffins spread their wings, the Sphinx fell asleep. There was no answer to her appeal.

Behind the sepulchre the moon rose; it dropped a beam near by. There is light somewhere, it seemed to say; and in that telegram from Above, she thought of Rome. She remembered now, in Rome was Tiberius, and in him Revenge. She smiled at her own forgetfulness. Yes, it was there. She would go to him, she would exact reparation; there should be another crucifixion. Pilate should be

nailed to the cross, Judas on one side, Caiaphas on the other. Only it would be at Rome where there was no Passover to interfere with the torture they endured. Things were done better there. Men were crucified, not with the head up, but with the feet; and so remained, not for hours, but for days; and died, not of their wounds alone, but of hunger too.

A chariot of dream caught her, and, borne across the intervening space, she saw herself in a palace where there were gods and monsters, columns of transparent quartz, floors of malachite, roofs of gold. And there, on a dais, the Cæsar lay. Behind him a fan, luminous as a peacock's tail, oscillated to the tinkling of mysterious keys. In his crown was the lividity of uncolored dawns, in his sceptre the dominion of the world. An ulcer devoured his face, and in his ear a boy repeated the maxims of Elephantis. Mary threw herself at his feet, her tears fell on them as rain on leaves. "Vengeance," she implored; but he listened merely to the boy at his side. "Death is your ser-

vant," she cried. "You command, it obeys." The ulcer oozed, the face grew vague, he gave no answer. She stood up and menaced him. "Behind you spectres crouch; you may not see them. I do; their name is To-morrow." The murmurs of the boy were her sole reply. The roof crumbled, the flooring disappeared, the emperor faded, and Mary stared into space.

The moon that had struck aslant the tomb had gone, but where its beams had fallen the message remained. There is light somewhere, it repeated. Across the heavens a meteor shot like a bee. In the air voices whispered confusedly. It is not in Rome, one seemed to say. It is not on earth, another called.

Mary clutched at her beating breast. The sky now was an opening rose. What the sunset had sown the dawn would reap. In the night that had enveloped, day raised a lattice, and through it came a gust of higher thought. It is not in revenge, a voice whispered. It is not in regret, another called.

"I know it," Mary gasped. "Yes, yes, I know it now. It is in faith."

"And in abnegation of self."

The stone which stood before the sepulchre had rolled away. At her side the Christ stood. In his eyes were golden parables, in his face Truth shone revealed. She stared, dumb with the unexpected joy of belief confirmed, blinded by the sudden light, while he who had rent the bonds of death passed on into the budding day.

When the brief procession of the night before returned to the tomb, it was empty. At the door Mary lay, her arms outstretched and vacant.

FINIS MARIÆ.

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